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# European Child Guarantee

Austria's National Action Plan



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# National Action Plan on Implementing the European Child Guarantee

## 1 Implementing the EU Child Guarantee in Austria: processes and stakeholder participation

Even before it was adopted at EU level, children in Austria dealt with the substantive priorities set out in the European Child Guarantee in the context of a study conducted in 2018 (Zartler et al., 2018), which identified five key recommendations derived from children's comments. Asked what policymakers should do to ensure that all children have access to essential goods and resources that are key to their well-being, children voiced the following:

- Recommendation 1: Take children seriously and ask children what they need
- Recommendation 2: Treat all children equally
- Recommendation 3: Raise awareness of children's rights and put children's rights into practice
- Recommendation 4: Create attractive leisure spaces and access to low-cost leisure goods
- Recommendation 5: Provide financial support to families who are not so well off

These recommendations are to accompany the implementation of the European Child Guarantee in Austria, as treating children as equals is of crucial importance to fostering their social participation and healthy development.

In line with the resolution adopted by the Council of Ministers on 15 September 2021 (Federal Government, 2021a), the Austrian Federal Government has committed itself to the Council objectives and core recommendations on the introduction of a European Child Guarantee. Supported by the Federal Government, the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, in consultation with the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research and the Federal Chancellery, Family and Youth Section, was tasked with coordinating activities aimed at preparing the National Action Plan on Implementing the European Child Guarantee in Austria. The Council of Ministers resolution also stipulates that the competent federal ministries and federal provinces are to be involved in accordance with their respective responsibilities. In line with traditional Austrian practice, the drafting and preparation of the National Action Plan as well as

the consideration of its contents in the implementation process builds on the closest possible coordination and participation of all relevant bodies and stakeholders, including non-governmental organisations. This involvement shall be ensured by the responsible ministries and the federal provinces within their respective sphere of influence. The joint aim pursued is for Austria to successfully meet the goals and objectives set out in the European Child Guarantee by 2030, thus sustainably improving the living conditions of all children in the country.

As per the Council of Ministers resolution mentioned above, chief physician Dr Klaus Vavrik was appointed Austrian National Coordinator for the European Child Guarantee. In appointing the National Coordinator, the Federal Government was led by Dr Vavrik's excellent reputation and in-depth expert knowledge as well as his many years of experience with respect to promoting children's well-being, especially in the field of child and youth health, as well as in the protection and promotion of children and their rights in general. In Austria, the role of the National Coordinator is understood as that of an ambassador who advocates for and promotes the objectives of the European Child Guarantee and engages the support of the various stakeholders. Dr Vavrik has held and will be holding a series of high-level meetings at federal, province and social partner level, including with social insurance institutions and non-governmental organisations, presenting and promoting the objectives and concerns set out in the European Child Guarantee, raising awareness of and fostering understanding for the topics addressed and seeking to convince relevant stakeholders of the importance of their contribution to achieving these objectives. Dr Vavrik furthermore contributes his own extensive expert knowledge. At EU level, he takes part in the regular meetings bringing together the National Coordinators of all EU Member States.

With a view to implementing the Guarantee and drawing up Austria's National Action Plan, former Federal Minister for Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, Dr Wolfgang Mückstein, set up a project team at administrative level and an in-house steering group at the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, which is responsible for overall project coordination and the preparation of the National Action Plan. In addition, the project team initiated the establishment of an Interministerial Steering Group composed of representatives from all three ministries referred to in the Council of Ministers resolution. This Steering Group is tasked with coordinating the project overall as well as those chapters of the National Action Plan that concern the other federal ministries.

Austria enjoys a long-standing tradition of stakeholder involvement in political opinion-forming processes, which it seeks to continue in implementing the European Child Guarantee. As the time between the adoption of the recommendation and deadline for submission of the National Action Plan, was, however, quite short, it was occasionally not always possible to live up to this fundamental commitment. This relates both to this

National Action Plan's drafting phase and to the development of an overall concept for comprehensive stakeholder participation throughout the Child Guarantee implementation process, including meaningful child and youth participation. This full-scale involvement was somewhat hampered by the generally more extensive lead time required when implementing projects involving children and young people and the COVID-19-related contact restrictions.

In a first step and seeking to reach out to all stakeholders, former Federal Minister Dr Wolfgang Mückstein sent a letter to all relevant actors requesting them to support the objectives pursued by the European Child Guarantee. This call was issued to other federal ministries, the Austrian Federal Provinces, social partner institutions, the Umbrella Organisation of Austrian Social Insurance Institutions (Dachverband der Sozialversicherungsträger), major umbrella organisations of entities active in the scope and sphere addressed by the European Child Guarantee, numerous civil society organisations active in the field of children's rights and the Austrian National Youth Council (Bundesjugendvertretung) as the official and legally established body representing the interests of children and young people in Austria. This letter informed stakeholders also of the heading under which the European Child Guarantee is to be implemented in Austria, namely "Programm Kinderchancen" (promoting opportunities for children). This title alone makes it very clear that in line with the Rights of the Child, all children are to have the same prospects and opportunities with a view to the goals and objectives set out in the Guarantee. In the letter, stakeholders were also asked to name a contact person for substantive cooperation and to notify the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection of the measures aimed at implementing the objectives pursued under the European Child Guarantee that were, have been or are to be launched within their entity's sphere of influence. Stakeholders were requested to submit these notifications of measures to the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection using a specifically created standardised data sheet. At the time this National Action Plan was prepared, some 600 measures had been submitted and are all specified in the Annex to the National Action Plan. Even after this Action Plan's submission to the European Commission, stakeholders still have the opportunity to send measures to [kindergarantie@sozialministerium.at](mailto:kindergarantie@sozialministerium.at). Outlined in the Annex, the measures received thus far are publicly accessible and form the basis for further action planning.

In addition, and also with the involvement of the National Coordinator, numerous existing bodies at province level, dialogue processes and other structures have been used as platforms both for presenting the objectives set out in the European Child Guarantee to a wider audience and for discussions on joint measures. Such bodies include, for instance, the Austrian Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion (Österreichische Plattform gegen Armut und soziale Ausgrenzung), the Austrian Health Targets (Gesundheitsziele Österreich) process and political conferences organised by both the federal provinces and the Federal Government.

In a second step, the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection organised a two-day conference in cooperation with UNICEF Austria on 13 and 14 December 2021. On the first day of the conference, which was held online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, representatives from the European Commission, the UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection and the National Coordinator presented and discussed the Guarantee's objectives and implementation process. Aimed at developing a common understanding of the objectives pursued by the European Child Guarantee, representatives from the Institute for Advanced Studies Vienna and the Vienna University of Economics and Business dealt in their content-related contributions with the living situation of children in Austria from an academic point of view. Representatives from UNICEF Austria and the Federal Youth Council presented the necessary prerequisites for successful and effective child and youth participation, which are also to serve as the starting point for such processes in the future. On the second day of the conference, participants dealt in nine breakout sessions with the six key services specified in the European Child Guarantee as well as further thematic areas related to the Guarantee. Alongside these key services (early childhood education and care, inclusive education and school-based activities, healthy school meals, healthcare and prevention, effective access to healthy nutrition and adequate housing), the sessions focussed on children's family environment, statistical monitoring, topics related to child and youth participation, stakeholder involvement and process support. The findings and results generated by the sessions were subsequently integrated in the substantive preparation of this National Action Plan, especially with a view to identifying existing challenges, gaps and needs in the areas addressed by the Guarantee. On behalf of the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, UNICEF Austria furthermore prepared a conference report (UNICEF Austria, 2022), which is publicly available.

Once work on this National Action Plan has been completed, a joint stakeholder participation process<sup>1</sup> will be developed in coordination between the three ministries mentioned in the above Council of Ministers resolution. In this context, account will also be taken of proposals generated by the multi-stakeholder dialogue held with UNICEF Austria, including – for instance – the establishment of a Sounding Board to be set up under the Austrian Children's Rights Board (Kinderrechte-Board)<sup>2</sup>. As the topics addressed in the European Child Guarantee relate to different stakeholders and policy areas, it would also

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<sup>1</sup> In one of the break-out sessions held in the context of the multi-stakeholder dialogue, participants prepared proposals for such a stakeholder participation process.

<sup>2</sup> Based on the Review of the 3<sup>rd</sup> / 4<sup>th</sup> State Report on the Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2012, the Monitoring Board for Children's Rights (now known as the Austrian Children's Rights Board) was installed at the then Federal Ministry of Economy, Family and Youth, now the Federal Chancellery, Family and Youth Section, as an independent advisory body dealing with the comprehensive implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Austria.

be possible to set up separate working groups (dialogue fora), fully tapping into synergies between existing participation structures. The goal is to launch and firmly establish a broad-based dialogue that brings together all relevant stakeholders to both discuss the thematic areas covered by the European Child Guarantee on an ongoing basis and further develop concepts and measures with a view to ensuring successful implementation in Austria by 2030. An essential element in this respect is direct involvement of children, as each child has the right to appropriate participation and consideration of his/her opinion regarding all matters affecting the child in accordance with Art. 4 of the Federal Constitutional Law on the Rights of Children (Bundesverfassungsgesetz-Kinderrechte, BVG-KR). In this context, particular use is to be made of the many years of experience, the numerous organisations involved in child participation processes have in this area. The aim is to provide children and young people with the necessary space and time as well as age-appropriate, binding forms of co-determination and participation. Special care is to be taken to ensure the most representative and low-threshold involvement of vulnerable children, especially regarding the core topics dealt with by the European Child Guarantee. It is also essential that the Sounding Board referred to above closely links its work to the children's and young people's participation process so as to ensure that their views and interests are fully taken into account in the Board's work. In the context of the planning processes, it is also important to consider the initiatives launched by Austria as part of the European Year of Youth 2022.

From the perspective of the Austrian Federal Government, the European Child Guarantee will make a significant contribution to further advancing the goals and thus promoting the spirit of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Austria, as well as to addressing the recommendations made by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in its recent concluding observations even more committedly through concrete measures (UN, 2020). This may also contribute to further promoting the Federal Constitutional Law on the Rights of Children (Bundesverfassungsgesetz-Kinderrechte, BVG-KR), whose protection of fundamental rights is currently being evaluated in the context of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – as provided for in the Government Programme. The Federal Government will also work towards ensuring that the European Child Guarantee makes a significant contribution towards the successful implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and its Action Plan, while at the same time also being in line with implementation of the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child.

At the global level, the European Child Guarantee will furthermore contribute substantially to the realisation of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and will as such serve as a good practice model for improving the living conditions of vulnerable children. Austria is committed to mainstreaming the development goals in all policy areas. This Action Plan thus refers to those development goals that correspond to the key services set out in the European Child Guarantee.



The Action Plan is structured along the six key services and the associated political fields of action under the European Child Guarantee. Each of the corresponding six central chapters essentially discusses the current situation in Austria (baseline), existing measures and programmes, vulnerable target groups, challenges and gaps identified as well as measures and objectives with a view to implementing the European Child Guarantee by 2030. A Special Chapter, preceding the six “Key Service” chapters deals with the living conditions of vulnerable children in Austria. The two subsequent Special Chapters 9 “Family and Youth” and 10 “Inclusion: Children and Young People with Disabilities” deal with political fields of action, the Federal Government also deems essential to ensuring the well-being of all children living in Austria. Implementation of the European Child Guarantee is accompanied by a national monitoring process, discussed in detail in Chapter 11 “Monitoring”. As mentioned at the beginning, a call to report measures within the scope of the European Child Guarantee was issued to all stakeholders in Austria. Their replies were collected and are presented in a tabular overview in the Annex, which provides information on programmes, measures, projects and possible further project ideas.

## 2 Child poverty and the well-being of children in Austria

### Current situation

The Austrian Federal Government attaches major importance to combating and preventing child poverty. Child poverty not only restricts the living conditions of those affected but it can also have long-term effects impacting the entire course of a person's life, with the associated negative repercussions on the national economy. Thus, it is essential to address and counter child poverty as early as possible and in a targeted manner. Enhanced equality of opportunities has a positive impact on each and everyone's life satisfaction and well-being, it contributes to social cohesion, promotes democratic participation and enables avoidance of consequential costs in the social system.

Poverty and child poverty can be multidimensional and affects many areas of life, including income, housing conditions, health, nutrition, clothing, education and social participation, to name but a few. What is more, children at risk of poverty or marginalisation do not have the same opportunities in education and employment as others. A study prepared by the OECD shows that there is relatively little social mobility in Austria. Thus income, education and socio-economic status still heavily depend on parents' status and are thus "passed on" from one generation to the next (Förster/Königs, 2020).

Attention should also be drawn to the fact that it is always necessary to consider figures on child poverty in the context of the data collection methodology used. For figures relating to the risk of poverty and marginalisation, for instance, the household-related survey (Haushaltsbetrachtung) approach is applied – which consists of the following three aggregated concepts/indicators: "At-risk-of-poverty", which is based on median income and therefore primarily provides information on income distribution, secondly "material and social deprivation", which provides information on lack of coverage of basic needs (no access to basic material necessities), and thirdly "low parental work intensity". In Austria, 353,000 children and young people up to the age of 18 were at risk of poverty or marginalisation in 2022 (Statistics Austria, 2023a). Although that is one in five children in Austria (22%), the risk of poverty or marginalisation is lower than the EU average.

Among children at risk of poverty or marginalisation, 41,000 (2%) suffer from severe lack of basic material necessities, i. e. they are not only unable to afford necessary goods but also to cover basic needs (also referred to as severe material and social deprivation) – which often severely impacts these children's life situations. A total of 58,000 children, for instance, cannot afford new clothing, 40,000 lack sufficient financial means to ensure adequate food and nutrition and 278,000 children cannot go on holiday for financial reasons (Statistics Austria, 2022a). Compared with other EU Member States, however, the levels of lack of basic material necessities among children and young people are relatively low: in Austria, the share of 0 to 17-year-olds affected by severe material and

social deprivation ranged at 2.2% in 2022, which is well below the EU average of 8.4% (Statistics Austria, 2023a).

Particularly children living in single-parent households, in households with three or more children and in households affected by unemployment are frequently affected by poverty. In single-parent households every second child (53%) is at risk of poverty or marginalisation, in multi-person households with at least three children it is 31%, and in households affected by long-term unemployment, the figure stands at 54% (Statistics Austria, 2022a).

In recent years, it has, however, been possible to bring down the risk of poverty or marginalisation in Austria as a whole, which also means that the number of children and young people affected dropped by 22,000 (Statistics Austria, 2023a). In this context, the living situation of adults has seen greater improvements – which is also attributable to the fact that around 9% of social spending is directed at families and children (see Chapter 9 Special Topic “Family and youth”), while around two thirds of the social budget is spent on care of the elderly and healthcare.

As the risk of being affected by child poverty is lower when parents are in gainful employment (Heitzmann/Pennerstorfer, 2021), the Federal Government seeks to facilitate parents’ participation in the labour market. In this spirit and with a view to promoting child education and making it easier for parents to work, the government has promoted the expansion of quality childcare and education coverage over the past ten years, and further increases as well as related measures are planned to ensure provision and availability of quality childcare and education (Federal Chancellery, 2021). Starting with the 2024 to 2028 financial equalisation programme, additional funding will be available for early childhood education under the Future Fund of the Republic of Austria (Zukunftsfonds). According to figures from the Main Association of Austrian Social Insurance Institutions, some 4 million people were in employment in July 2023 – the highest number ever recorded.

Alongside primary prevention of poverty through employment, a range of public benefits and services aimed at either directly or indirectly preventing or reducing poverty are in place – including such in-kind benefits as provision of education or healthcare. Children’s socio-economic situation depends on their parents’ situation. Benefits that are intended to also benefit children are therefore usually granted to adults. The policies adopted and services offered by the Austrian welfare system play a key role in preventing poverty and promoting redistribution. If social benefits, allowances and pensions were not available, 37% of children and young people under the age of 18 would be at risk of poverty. Thanks to social benefits, the figure has dropped to 18% and for many people poverty is only a temporary episode in their lives (Federal Chancellery, 2021).

Family services and benefits are an important means of combating poverty, as child-related costs are high. The current Child Cost Analysis (Bauer et al., 2021) calculated the additional income required by a household with child(ren) to achieve the same level of prosperity as a comparable household without child(ren). On average, the monthly child-related costs incurred by a household with two adults amount to some 500 euros and are significantly higher for a single-parent household. A study by the Austrian Institute of Economic Research (Fink/Rocha-Akis, 2021) shows that some of these costs are covered by family-related benefits and services – in particular the family allowance (Familienbeihilfe) – made available by the federal level. Family-related services and benefits made available by the federal, province and local governments have a strong redistributive effect that benefits the lower income deciles (Prettenthaler et al., 2022). Another important family benefit is the “Family Bonus Plus”, introduced in 2019 as a tax deduction per child and can be claimed by all persons fully taxable in Austria (Federal Chancellery, 2021). Low-income earners not subject to payment of income tax may benefit from the supplementary child benefit (Kindermehrbetrag), which was – like Family Bonus Plus – increased in 2022. Since 1 January 2023, all family benefits have been subject to annual automatic valorisation. All of these measures make a significant contribution to relieving the burden on low-income families.

Civil society actors, i.e. relief organisations and other NGOs, play an important role in combating poverty. Supplementing the public system, they are able to address individual crisis situations in a targeted manner, largely supported by public funding. Social safety nets established at the level of the Austrian Federal Provinces, municipalities and local associations also contribute to preventing and alleviating poverty. What is more, donations to charitable organisations are tax-deductible in Austria, which helps to foster civic engagement.

### **Measures introduced in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic**

The negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic also affected child poverty. People, who were already at risk of poverty and social exclusion before the crisis, were disproportionately affected by the related negative effects (Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 2020). When parents become unemployed, lose their job or are on short-time work children face an elevated risk of poverty or exclusion. Parents’ financial problems are not only a source of psychological distress (Dawid, 2021), but also lead to a loss of well-being and quality of life. Financial problems may furthermore not only translate into a lack of healthy diet and exercise, resulting in rising overweight and obesity levels, but also into declining education levels and long-term consequences for people’s participation in the workforce.

Distance learning posed a particular challenge for families with schoolchildren. Especially at the beginning of the pandemic, children at risk of poverty or marginalisation often

lacked the prerequisites for e-learning. Furthermore, cramped living conditions faced their families with major challenges. These problems widened the gap to other pupils who were not affected by such disadvantages (Fink/Steiner, 2020). Responding to the above challenges, the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research launched a COVID-19 package of measures aimed at supporting school locations with increased support needs and/or locations facing special socio-economic challenges with additional learning resources.

By launching such measures as Comprehensive Short-time Working Support (Kurzarbeitsunterstützung), the COVID-19 Family Hardship Fund (Corona-Familienhärtefonds), the Family Crisis Fund (Familienkrisenfonds), established by the Federal Government, as well as the one-off payment of a Child Bonus (Kinderbonus) of 360 euros and a range of further support services made available at province and municipal level, it was possible to largely mitigate the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to measures aimed at countering the immediate impacts of the COVID-19 crisis, the Federal Government implemented numerous proven and successful programmes that still contribute to preventing early disadvantage during childhood and youth and to promoting children's long-term development prospects. Such programmes include the School Start Package (Schulstartpaket) for particularly vulnerable pupils at the start of school, the promotion of supervised visiting contacts and Early Childhood Intervention Programmes (Frühe Hilfen), which were rolled out across Austria during this legislative period. Furthermore, the financial literacy programmes directed specifically at young people also contribute to reducing disadvantages in later/adult life.

### **Measures against inflation**

After inflation rates had been quite low for many years, the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine led to sharp price hikes. At the end of 2022, inflation rates had increased by 11%, marking the highest rise in 70 years. The main price drivers in this context are the costs for energy and fuel (Statistics Austria, 2022b). Due to low disposable household incomes and saving levels, households affected by poverty and at-risk-of-poverty in particular, find it hard to make ends meet or even impossible to cope with rising household expenditure triggered by price increases (Federal Ministry of Finance & Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 2022).

Against this background, the Federal Government adopted three anti-inflation packages. The comprehensive measures aimed at mitigating the negative impact of inflation set out in these packages include both immediate (rapid relief) and structural (sustainable relief) measures. In addition to the aforementioned valorisation of social and family benefits, the Federal Government, for instance, abolished the fiscal drag, paid out the "Climate Bonus" (Klimabonus) and the "Anti-inflation Bonus" (Anti-Teuerungsbonus) of 500 euros,

and reduced the financial burden on vulnerable groups such as the unemployed, recipients of equalisation supplements (Ausgleichszulage), families and recipients of social welfare payments through targeted/needs-based one-off payments. Furthermore, the Federal Government introduced the “Electricity Price Brake” (Strompreisbremse) in December 2022. By subsidising basic electricity consumption, the Government thus seeks to counteract the current price increases for electricity, while at the same time incentivising consumers to save electricity. Thanks to this cost brake, an average household will pay some 500 euros less for its electricity bill (Federal Ministry of Finance, 2022).

Under the WOHNSCHIRM (housing umbrella) programme, the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection supports people who have rent arrears attributable to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic or the current price hikes and are therefore at risk of being evicted. In the context of the measures aimed at counteracting the negative impacts of inflation, the funds allocated under the budget were increased and the programme was extended until the end of 2026. From now on, support will not only cover payment of rent arrears, but will also be extended to people struggling with energy cost arrears attributable to rising inflation rates. The support thus provided supplements existing assistance programmes to prevent eviction and/or ensure households’ energy supply made available by the federal provinces, cities and municipalities (Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 2023).

Despite numerous measures taken by the Federal Government to combat inflation, the ongoing inflation crisis is showing that not all people living in Austria are equally affected by its consequences. Those most affected by precarious situations, especially financial hardship, continue to be families with children, particularly single parents. Against this background, the Federal Government in spring 2023 decided to make children an even stronger focus of its policies. In June 2023, the Austrian National Council therefore passed a targeted package of measures<sup>3</sup> totalling around 500 million euros and specifically tailored to families with children at risk of poverty. The package consists of five key measures specifically directed at families with low incomes:

1. People with children who receive unemployment benefit, emergency assistance (Notstandshilfe), welfare benefits (Sozialhilfe) or an equalisation supplement will automatically receive a monthly payment of 60 euros per child until the end of 2024.
2. Children of single parents or sole income earner parents with a low income, whereby the monthly gross income reference limit of 2,000 euros must not be exceeded, will automatically receive a monthly payment of 60 euros until the end of 2024.

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<sup>3</sup> 55<sup>th</sup> Federal Act amending the Federal Act governing compensation for the increase cost of living and housing caused by inflation (Living and Housing Cost Compensation Act) (Lebenshaltungs- und Wohnkosten-Ausgleichsgesetz, LWA-G): [Federal Law Gazette \(Bundesgesetzblatt, BGBlA\) 2023 I 55.pdf](#) (bka.gv.at)

3. The “weiterlernen.at” (continue learning) programme, which has been running since 2021 and provides socio-economically disadvantaged children with free access to learning support from non-governmental organisations and student teachers, will receive an increase in funding. In addition to funding of 10 million euros from the European Union, a further 10 million euros will be made available by the Federal Government until the end of 2024.
4. The voucher for the “Schulstartklar” (Ready for School) project, which is co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF+) and enables children from households on social welfare to be provided with age and school-type appropriate school items and materials, will be increased from 120 to 150 euros. The voucher will also be made available twice per school year (at the start of school in September and at the beginning of the second term in February), with additional funding amounting to 15 million euros.
5. Recipients of social assistance will furthermore receive a special payment of 60 euros per month until the end of 2023, which will also benefit children living in the household.

Under this far-reaching anti-inflation package, specifically tailored additional support is thus made available to financially disadvantaged families and their children in an unbureaucratic and targeted manner.

### **Objectives and next steps in the Child Guarantee process up to 2030**

The Government Programme clearly reflects the Federal Government’s commitment to combating poverty. The ambitious goals, the Federal Government has set itself in this respect, are to be achieved primarily through work that enables people to secure their livelihoods and a decent wage. Where families find themselves unable to ensure and safeguard financial security by themselves (e.g. by participating in the labour market), this security is provided through social benefits and services. In this respect, the Government Programme places a special focus on combating child poverty and poverty among single parents.

The objective pursued under this National Action Plan on implementing the European Child Guarantee is to reduce the number of children and young people at risk of poverty or marginalisation in Austria by half by 2030. Likewise, the share of children and young people affected by severe material deprivation (significant, enforced lack of necessary items to lead a decent life) is also to be reduced by half.

	Objective	Indicator	Source	Baseline	Interim target 1	Interim target 2	Target 2030
1	Reducing the risk of poverty or marginalisation among children and young people by half	Share of children and adolescents at risk of poverty or marginalisation (aged 0–17 years)	EU SILC	22% (2022)	17.5% (2025)	/	11% (2030)
2	Reducing severe material and social deprivation among children and adolescents by half	Share of children and adolescents experiencing severe material and social deprivation (aged 0–17 years)	EU SILC	2% (2022)	1.5% (2025)	/	1% (2030)

## Children and young people and the humanitarian crisis caused by the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine

In line with its long-standing humanitarian tradition and in view of the acute emergency in Ukraine, Austria not only supports the efforts of humanitarian organisations on the ground and in neighbouring countries, but also seeks to provide to persons displaced from Ukraine the best possible support and assistance here in Austria.

With regard to aid on the ground in Ukraine, up to 4 million euros are to be made available from the Austrian Foreign Disaster Fund for the UNICEF “Humanitarian Action for Children: Ukraine Crisis 2022 – Response for Children” programme, supplementing a range of further humanitarian aid activities. This funding contributes to financing emergency relief measures, including access to primary healthcare facilities for children and women, to sufficient drinking water, psychosocial support for parents and guardians, formal and informal education, and cash assistance for private households. In the context of this support, particularly vulnerable children such as orphans, unaccompanied children or children and adolescents that have been separated from their parents as well as children with disabilities enjoy special priority (Federal Government, 2022b).

In this context, it needs to be mentioned that those displaced from Ukraine staying in Austria are mainly women and children seeking international protection. The current situation is thus in stark contrast to the years 2015/16. With its Temporary Protection Directive governing mass influx, the EU has put a new legal framework into effect that is being implemented by Austria in accordance with the “Ordinance of the Federal Government on a Temporary Right of Residence for Displaced Persons from Ukraine (Displaced Persons Ordinance, Vertriebenenverordnung – VertriebenenVO)”<sup>4</sup> in order to

<sup>4</sup> 92<sup>nd</sup> Ordinance of the Federal Government on a Temporary Right of Residence for Displaced Persons from Ukraine (Displaced Persons Ordinance – VertriebenenVO): [RIS – Displaced Persons Ordinance, Federal Law consolidated, version of 22 February 2023 \(bka.gv.at\)](#)



quickly and unbureaucratically grant displaced persons from Ukraine protection and/or temporary right of residence until 4 March 2025.

This makes displaced persons from Ukraine a target group for coverage under the basic services and primary care scheme (Grundversorgung) in Austria. Foreigners in need of assistance and protection first of all receive benefits and services aimed at covering basic daily needs such as adequate food, accommodation, medical care, clothing services and school supplies as well as information and counselling. With respect to the key services specified in the European Child Guarantee, refugee children from Ukraine enjoy the same access to provision of basic services and primary care as refugee children of other nationalities and/or backgrounds. This means that the federal childcare facilities are to provide comprehensive, adequate care to these children, fully respecting the best interests of the child. Alongside early childhood, education and care programmes, these services also include provision of appropriate services and care to children with disabilities and at risk of vulnerability. Furthermore, the provision of healthcare is also guaranteed for those covered by the federal basic services and primary care scheme.

Since the amendment to the 1967 Family Burdens Equalisation Act (Familienlastenausgleichsgesetz) (Federal Law Gazette 135/2022) entered into effect, persons who pursuant to Section 62 (1) of the 2005 Asylum Act were granted a temporary right of residence under the Displaced Persons Ordinance have been entitled to claim family allowance (Familienbeihilfe) for their children who had also been granted temporary right of residence – provided the general requirements are met. Furthermore, displaced persons from Ukraine are also entitled to childcare allowance (Kinderbetreuungsgeld) subject to fulfilment of the general eligibility requirements.

With a view to supporting the swift integration of this new target group, the Austrian Integration Fund (Österreichischer Integrationsfonds, ÖIF) has set up (mobile) service points where staff from information and counselling centres offer comprehensive initial counselling and advice to displaced persons from Ukraine to facilitate their successful integration process right from the very outset. In addition to comprehensive counselling and advice on integration services, on German language courses and on entering the Austrian labour market, a key focus is placed on education, especially for children. In the context of integration counselling, the Austrian Integration Fund also provides individual advice to mothers who have questions related to their children and provides guidance, for instance on access to childcare facilities, the Austrian early childhood education and school system, and on the education system in general. Counselling is offered in Ukrainian, German and Russian. Integration services are furthermore adapted to meet the target group's needs. On a dedicated telephone hotline that was specifically set up, Integration Fund staff who speak Ukrainian, answer questions, for instance, on where to turn to for initial care, support and guidance in Austria.

A special “Buddy Programme” was launched for young people from Ukraine. Teenagers and adolescents who are older than 12 years and have come to Austria from Ukraine are assisted by young volunteers from Austria. The programme seeks to make it easier for young displaced persons to feel at home in Austria. Committed “buddies” aged 16 plus may apply to the Austrian Integration Fund, stating their willingness to help displaced Ukrainians learn German or assist them in their everyday lives at school or at university, and also spend leisure time with them.

The swiftest possible access for children and young people from Ukraine to the key services set out in the European Child Guarantee, is considered an essential contribution to improving their current living conditions.

The right to education is a fundamental human right that is enshrined in numerous international and European human rights documents and treaties ratified by Austria, including Art. 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Art. 22 of the Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. Especially in times of conflict, access to education is an important prerequisite for ensuring prospects of a peaceful and positive future.

The Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research therefore works proactively towards ensuring the rapid integration of displaced persons into the Austrian education system. In this spirit, it has launched numerous measures and services, such as the provision of free video and telephone interpreting<sup>5</sup> services, advice on valuable teaching, learning and information materials as well as the provision of school psychology services and support at school, seeking to make it easier for children and adolescents to feel at home in Austria. Building on a wide range of services and the establishment of integrative or parallel German language support classes, it is ensured that children and young people from Ukraine receive the support they need. The Agreement between the Federal Government and the Provinces under Article 15a Federal Constitutional Law (Bundesverfassungsgesetz, B-VG) on early childhood education also provides for the opportunity to utilise special purpose grants in a needs-based manner in this context and thus also make support available to children between the ages of 0 and 6.

With regard to access to healthcare, children of asylum seekers and other persons receiving benefits under the temporary basic services scheme made available by the federal and provincial governments are by federal ordinance included in the statutory health insurance system and therefore already receive free access to statutory health insurance benefits. In order to enable other vulnerable refugees from Ukraine and their children to also gain quick and easy access to healthcare services in Austria, Ukrainian nationals and other persons who are temporarily admitted to Austria from 24 February 2022 due to the

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<sup>5</sup> Please see: [www.bmbwf.gv.at/videodolmetsch](http://www.bmbwf.gv.at/videodolmetsch)

war in Ukraine (and do not receive benefits under the temporary basic services scheme) are now also covered by the statutory health insurance system by federal ordinance. For the time being, this measure is provisionally limited until 31 December 2023<sup>6</sup>. In March 2022, the above-mentioned expert group on psychosocial support for people with a migrant background furthermore dealt in detail with the situation of and the services for refugees, placing a special focus on children from Ukraine. “Gesundheit Österreich GmbH” (the Austrian National Public Health Institute) is currently performing a full analysis of the services provided. The goal is to facilitate coordination, interlinking and successful further referral while at the same time identifying any gaps that need to be closed. The findings will then be shared by the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection.

As the measures, services and initiatives launched to promote healthy eating and described in this Action Plan are being implemented in line with the Austrian Health Targets (Gesundheitsziele Österreich) and/or in the context of various other settings such as kindergartens or schools, they equally benefit children and young people with a refugee background.

Since displaced persons from Ukraine are generally a target group receiving assistance under the above-mentioned temporary basic services scheme, responsibility for accommodation and care – and therefore housing – rests with the federal provinces. Accommodation made available by the federal provinces generally consists of smaller units (such as former B & Bs, hotels etc.) within their area of responsibility and jurisdiction. In addition, and in close coordination with the Federal Ministry of the Interior, the federal provinces and civil society organisations, private individuals may also offer accommodation for displaced persons from Ukraine, provided such accommodation meets the necessary requirements.

Since the requirement to hold a work permit was abolished for this target group at the end of April 2023, major bureaucratic hurdles were dismantled, and it has been possible for displaced persons to access the Austrian labour market even faster. Furthermore, the additional earnings limit (Zuverdienstgrenze) for displaced persons receiving support under the basic services scheme was raised.

Finally, it must be noted that since the beginning of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and since the arrival of the first displaced persons from Ukraine in Austria, aid organisations and countless volunteers from Austrian civil society have

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<sup>6</sup> 104<sup>th</sup> Ordinance of the Federal Minister of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection amending the Ordinance on the implementation of health insurance for persons included in the health insurance system pursuant to § 9 Federal Act on General Social Insurance (Allgemeines Sozialversicherungsgesetz, ASVG): [RIS document \(bka.gv.at\)](#)

undertaken outstanding efforts to support those affected in almost all areas of life as quickly, unbureaucratically and actively as possible. With a view to providing rapid, easy and unbureaucratic assistance to these volunteers, the Austrian Integration Fund in cooperation with the Federal Chancellery has launched a new funding scheme aimed at supporting volunteer initiatives in their work with Ukrainians. In a joint effort involving all authorities at federal, province and municipal level, Austria seeks to optimise and expand its related services in an ongoing manner. In line with its long-standing tradition, Austria is thus (again) providing humanitarian support and assistance to refugees from Europe and other parts of the world.

### 3 Key Service “Early Childhood Education and Care”

#### Baseline, political framework and allocation of responsibilities

Early childhood education and care makes an essential contribution towards promoting every child’s socialisation and positive development, and therefore plays an important role with respect to promoting children’s opportunities and prospects in later life. Especially for vulnerable children within the definition of the European Child Guarantee, access to high-quality, early childhood education programmes has a very positive impact on later educational outcomes and personal development opportunities in adulthood.

Based on the sharing of powers defined under constitutional law, responsibility for legislation, implementation and enforcement on all matters relating to early childhood education lies with the federal provinces. Hence, the provinces not only regulate the framework conditions for institutions providing early childhood education, but also finance these accordingly. As a result of this division of powers, agreements between the Federal Government and the federal provinces in accordance with Article 15a of the Federal Constitutional Law (Bundesverfassungsgesetz, B-VG) have been concluded on an ongoing basis since 2008. This enables the Federal Government to make investments that are linked to certain conditions to be fulfilled by the federal provinces. The agreement currently in force for the kindergarten years 2022/23 to 2026/27<sup>7</sup> sets out priorities in terms of content, including on ongoing development and expansion of kindergarten coverage, compulsory non-contributory attendance and early language support. It includes, for instance, a standardised linguistic proficiency assessment tool and intensified language support for four-year-olds. Other provisions relate to further developing and upskilling staff, placing a stronger focus on the interface between early childhood educational institutions and schools, promoting the development and expansion of services for children under the age of three, more flexible and longer opening hours, enhancing the qualified staff-child ratio as well as the contribution-free compulsory kindergarten year for five-year-olds.

The implementation of the Article 15a agreement on Early Childhood Education and Care (i.e. formal childcare from the age of three until entering primary education as well as early childhood education up to the age of three) will also make a substantial contribution to implementing the European Child Guarantee in Austria.

Early childhood education and care is in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, in particular Articles 18 “Responsibility for the best interests of the



<sup>7</sup> Agreement pursuant to Article 15a Federal Constitutional Law (Bundesverfassungsgesetz, BV-G) between the Federal Government and the federal provinces on Early Childhood Pedagogy for the kindergarten years 2022/23 to 2026/27: [Federal Law Gazette \(Bundesgesetzblatt, BG-BLA\) 2022 I 148.pdf](#) (bka.gv.at)

child –ensuring the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children” and 23 “Promotion of children with disabilities”, as well as Article 28 “Right to education” and Article 29 on the objectives of education and educational institutions. It furthermore contributes to the implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular to Sustainable Development Goal 4 and indirectly to Goals 1 and 10.

### **Stakeholder participation and awareness-raising**

Alongside the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, which is responsible for the training of qualified staff at the relevant educational institutions and teacher training colleges, pre-school integration, intercultural education and – in consultation with the Federal Chancellery, Family and Youth Section – for the coordination and implementation of the above Agreement between the Federal Government and the federal provinces, the most important stakeholders in the field of early childhood education are the federal provinces and municipalities, as responsibility for the vast majority of early childhood education and care institutions falls within the scope of the latter. Furthermore, there are a number of private law organisations that provide and operate such facilities. These organisations receive funding from the federal provinces and are obliged to fulfil the quality standards set by the latter. During the term of the respective Article 15a agreement between the Federal Government and the federal provinces, the latter evaluate the implementation of the measures specified in the agreement, thus ensuring comprehensive nationwide evaluation by the end of its term. This evaluation is to be extended until 2030.

### **Existing measures and programmes**

The provision of early childhood education and care services is governed by the federal provinces’ relevant legal bases and relies on funding from the federal provinces and municipalities (2021: some 3.1 billion euros). In addition, the Federal Government makes available 200 million euros annually for the kindergarten years 2022/23 to 2026/27 as determined by the Article 15a agreement between the Federal Government and the federal provinces, described above. The goals pursued under this agreement include fostering early language support for all children – and especially those with a first language other than German – in the last two kindergarten years before they start school, and to provide targeted support for the transition from early childhood education to school. At the same time, targeted funding is made available to promote children’s level of development, including first language skills. In this context, some 22.8 million euros are made available annually under the above-mentioned special-purpose grants.

Building on a range of agreements between the federal and province level, half-day attendance of private and public early childhood education as well as mixed-age childcare facilities in the last year before a child starts school has been free of charge across Austria since 2009 and has also been compulsory since September 2010. Thus “effective” and “free” access to high-quality early childhood education and care for all five-year olds is ensured across Austria. In this context, the federal provinces are required to ensure that parents/legal guardians of all children subject to compulsory pre-school attendance are informed in a suitable manner of the obligation for their children to attend half-day, non-contributory compulsory early childhood education and care facilities. Under the current Article 15a agreement, the federal provinces may claim federal funding support (special subsidies) for the costs attributable to their provision of early childhood educational facilities for non-contributory attendance (totalling 80 million euros per year). Thanks to the introduction of this compulsory “last year of kindergarten”, the coverage rate for five-year olds has increased by 2.8 percentage points and now stands at 99.1%.

The Article 15a agreement between the federal and the province level also governs the development and expansion of places for children under the age of three. While on the one hand making it easier for working parents/guardians – especially single parents – to reconcile work and family life, the agreement on the other hand enables provision of age-appropriate educational services to children at an early age. In this context, the Federal Government is investing in improving barrier-free accessibility to also provide children with disabilities with a suitable childcare place. The development of attendance rates for children under the age of three and the proportion of children in VIF-compliant<sup>8</sup> facilities are relevant key figures in the context of improving the compatibility of family and work in Austria. These indicators are also directly related to the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goal 4, aimed at ensuring inclusive, equitable and quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.

The costs for services provided to children under the age of five vary greatly between the federal provinces – which is attributable to the division and allocation of responsibilities described above. Several provinces consider offering free kindergarten attendance also for this age group. While in some federal provinces these services are completely free of charge, others only offer half-day childcare free of charge or for certain age groups. By the same token, parental contributions vary greatly and may range from 20 to 345 euros

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<sup>8</sup> The “Reconciliation of Family and Work Indicator” (Vereinbarkeitsindikator für Familie und Beruf, VIF) was developed by the Vienna Chamber of Labour in 2006 to assess how many childcare places are necessary to facilitate parents’ full-time employment. The indicator was later also included into the Article 15a agreement between the Federal Government and the Federal Provinces to promote the development and expansion of places in early childhood education facilities. Hence, “opening hours of childhood education facilities in accordance with the VIF criteria” are opening hours that are compatible with parents’ full-time employment, i.e. at least 47 weeks per kindergarten year, at least 45 hours per week, on weekdays from Monday to Friday, at least 9.5 hours per day four days, including lunch provided for the children.

per month, depending on the time a child spends in the facility and the child's age (Förster/Koenigs, 2020). In many cases, the costs are based on parents' income, taking account of the overall socio-economic situation of the household. In order to cover the costs of child education and care, parents may also apply for an income-related childcare allowance, and local authorities also offer various support options.

### **Identified target groups**

With respect to access to early childhood education, primarily children from socio-economically disadvantaged households, children with a migration background from certain countries of origin and children with disabilities are to be considered as vulnerable. Furthermore, children with health-related disadvantages such as chronic illnesses, developmental disabilities or delays, also require special support with regard to their health-related issues or impairments as well as increased support with social participation – including in early childhood education. Acquisition of their first language skills is also to be supported and encouraged among children from ethnic minorities. In addition, the opportunity to attend an early childhood educational and care facility also depends on children's place of residence and the respective urbanisation level, as regional coverage in terms of (affordable / all-day) appropriate educational institutions varies greatly between federal provinces and municipalities.

### **Measures and programmes directed at vulnerable children**

The Article 15a agreement between the Federal Government and the Federal Provinces provides for a range of essential support measures aimed specifically at vulnerable children within the meaning of the European Child Guarantee. Such measures include, for instance, promoting the developmental status and providing special support to children with insufficient knowledge of German as the language of instruction right from the beginning of early childhood education and care – and especially in the last two years of kindergarten before the start of compulsory schooling – as well as strengthening children's pre-school skills in maths, technology and science, and promoting their artistic, musical, creative, emotional, psychosocial and physical development through relevant educational measures.

The compulsory, non-contributory kindergarten year before starting school also has a positive effect on the participation and promotion of the above-mentioned target groups. In addition, the current Article 15a agreement places a focus on supporting measures aimed at making facilities fully barrier-free.

The federal provinces furthermore provide a wide range of support programmes to specifically promote vulnerable children. Such programmes, for instance, include the provision of technical aids for children with sensory, physical or communication disabilities,



mobile curative education services to support children with increased support needs, funding for travel costs to transport children with disabilities to facilities or initiatives specialised in enhancing and promoting early language and reading skills. Furthermore, professional development programmes for teachers are continuously being expanded, including on children's rights and/or sign language teacher education.

Austria's commitment to respecting and promoting its ethnic groups and the associated minority languages is also reflected in early childhood education (for details please see Chapter 4 Key Service "Inclusive education and school-based activities"). In the respective federal provinces, equitable education in the ethnic minorities' languages is offered not only in schools, but also in early childhood education institutions. This educational offer is open to all children in these federal provinces and is thus directed not only at supporting children belonging to the respective national minorities, but at enabling all children to acquire further language skills, thus generally promoting intercultural skills, cultural openness and creativity. In the context of early childhood education teacher training programmes, the federal provinces also offer regional programmes in the national minorities' languages.

### **Challenges, gaps and needs**

Different responsibilities and the constitutional division of competences/allocation of powers, described above, represent a structural challenge for the nationwide standardised provision of early childhood education services. In line with the Austrian constitution, the federal provinces are responsible for the kindergarten system and thus the actual management of early childhood education and care (ECEC) facilities, while the Federal Government holds responsibility for training ECEC teachers and assistants as well as defining certain employment requirements. As regards practical operational aspects, framework conditions may also differ between the federal provinces and the ECEC operating facilities (e.g. public or private). As early childhood education and care in Austria is very fragmented, major differences between the federal provinces prevail with respect to the designations used, availability, costs, opening hours and group sizes (Förster/Koenigs, 2020).

In recent years, Austria has taken a number of steps to steadily increase participation rates in early childhood education and care. While ECEC (incl. registered childminders) participation rates rose from 86.6 % to 95.4 % for three to six-year-olds between 2007/08 and 2022/23, thus exceeding the corresponding Barcelona Target of 90 %, participation rates for children under the age of three remained below the Barcelona Target of 33 % in the same period – despite an increase of 14.0 % to 32.1 %. According to national statistics, however, they are just above the new Barcelona Target of 31.9 %, defined for this age group for Austria by 2030 (Council of the European Union, 2022). In this age group, ECEC attendance rates often vary considerably between the individual regions of Austria,

which can be attributed inter alia to social and economic factors as well as insufficient coverage. At 43.1%, the share of children under the age of three participating in 2022/23 in ECEC facilities (including registered childminders) in the Federal Province of Vienna is almost twice as high as in the provinces of Styria (24.0%) and Upper Austria (23.4%), for instance. The corresponding 2022 Barcelona Target is currently being achieved in the federal provinces of Vienna, Burgenland, Vorarlberg, Carinthia and Lower Austria (Statistics Austria, 2022c). All federal provinces have registered increases in childcare for children under the age of three. In Austria, almost every third child in this age group participated in ECEC in the 2022/23 kindergarten year, compared to only every fifth child in 2012/13 (Statistics Austria, 2023c).

Even though it has been possible to increase the number of ECEC personnel and to also improve the teacher – childcare ratio in recent years thanks to extensive investments, the general staff shortage continues to pose a challenge. This is mostly due to salaries and working conditions that are both not attractive enough to attract adequate numbers of professionals – which holds particularly true for those who work with vulnerable children. The topic of early childhood education was also dealt with in a separate breakout session in the context of the multi-stakeholder dialogue held with UNICEF Austria. In their discussions, participants came inter alia to the conclusion that developing more appropriate framework conditions would – alongside uniform nationwide quality standards – count among the most important challenges for the future. An integral element in this respect constitutes a more differentiated attitude towards ECEC facilities, i. e. to consider them more as educational institutions rather than as mere childcare facilities. Other topics addressed were the insufficient numbers of accompanying low-threshold and interdisciplinary services as well as the weak expansion of language support and special accompanying support for families with a migration background (UNICEF Austria, 2022). Regarding children with disabilities, there is also still a need for action with respect to appropriate preparation of adequate training content in the field of inclusive early childhood education (Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, and Consumer Protection, 2012). In the academic year 2022/23, the new university course “Inclusive Early Childhood Education”, which is based on a dedicated newly developed curriculum, was introduced at teacher training colleges.

A major issue were the (partial) closures of early childhood education and care facilities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which put an enormous strain on affected children and their families. As participating in ECEC at these facilities demonstrably has the potential to compensate social inequality, these closures temporarily affected early childhood educational opportunities. In addition, limited contact with peers and caregivers outside their own families has a negative impact on social-emotional and mental development, especially for children from backgrounds with limited resources (Haas et al., 2021). One measure to maintain a reliable level of childcare security was “special care time” (Sonderbetreuungszeit), which was adapted several times. Thus,

working people who have care responsibilities for children up to the age of 14 or for persons with special needs, or who are caregiving relatives of persons in need of care, were given a legal entitlement to take off up to three weeks from work to meet these care responsibilities while staying in employment, with the costs incurred by the employer being reimbursed by the government.

### **Objectives within the Child Guarantee process until 2030**

Under the current Article 15a agreement between the Federal Government and the Federal Provinces, the following targets, whose output effect is to be reviewed in the context of the “end of Agreement term evaluation” at the end of the 2026/27 kindergarten year, were defined as follows:

- The child to staff ratio for under-three-year-olds is to be increased by 1 percentage point per federal province and year; the common goal is to achieve a child to staff ratio of at least 33% in the 2022/23 kindergarten year.
- The share of three to six-year-old children attending early childhood educational establishments that meet the “VIF criteria” is to be increased based on the related needs assessment performed by the municipalities; the common goal is to achieve a child to staff ratio of 52.8% in the kindergarten year 2022/23. The general goal is to increase the ratio by 6 percentage points by the 2026/27 kindergarten year.
- The impact indicator for early language support is to exceed the level of 30% per federal province per funding year, with the common goal of exceeding this level by 40% per federal province and funding year.
- The number of pupils/students classified as “non-regular” (for instance due to insufficient German language skills) in the first grade has been reduced by at least 10% per federal province.
- A total of 15% of teaching staff per federal province has already completed the respective training course and acquired the necessary skills for providing early language support (calculated from the entry into force of the agreement).
- Per federal province, the special-purpose grant for early language support has been paid out to at least 40% of the early childhood educational establishments that meet the necessary requirement, the common goal is for this funding to be paid out to half of the eligible early childhood educational establishments per federal province.

In its 2020–2024 Government Programme, the Federal Government has set itself the goal of enhancing and expanding the provision of adequate early childhood education and care, particularly for vulnerable children. The objective pursued is to improve reconciliation of family and work life by expanding early childhood education coverage, ensuring more flexible opening hours compatible with both parents working full-time and

increasing the quality of services. Furthermore, proposals for uniform minimum quality standards in early childhood education are to be developed – relating, for instance, to staff, governing structural framework conditions and educational content, including standardised nationwide strategies for quality assurance in early childhood education facilities, the evaluation of training paths for staff and diversity in ECEC teams. Closely linked to inclusive education is the ongoing professionalization and strengthening of staff's inclusive teaching skills as well as the further development and expansion of inclusive educational services for children with disabilities.

With regard to children belonging to national minorities, the Federal Government has also committed itself in its Government Programme 2020–2024 to holding talks with the federal provinces and municipalities aimed at jointly providing the necessary impact-oriented funding (quality assurance in the educational group) to ensure the establishment, maintenance and promotion of bilingual and multilingual kindergartens, of national minorities as well as other early childhood care services. In this spirit, the Agreement pursuant to Article 15a Federal Constitutional Law (Bundesverfassungsgesetz, B-VG) on Early Childhood Education and Care for the kindergarten years 2022/23–2026/27 also provides for ensuring the promotion of measures aimed at preserving national minorities' languages in compliance with the implementation of language education framework concepts.

Children with disabilities may either attend a mainstream early childhood educational establishment, an early childhood educational establishment with integrative groups for children with special needs or a special early childhood educational establishment providing medical care alongside education. Although there is currently no legal entitlement to a place in such an educational establishment, Austria is placing a special focus on promoting “integrative education” (integrative Erziehung). Under this inclusive approach, children with disabilities are taught alongside their peers without disabilities. Integrative education represents a major opportunity for all children, and especially for pre-schoolers, as these age groups are less biased than older children. Besides, acquiring skills together with peers (with and without disabilities) in a social environment plays a key role in all early childhood educational establishments.

The inclusion of children with disabilities at kindergarten age remains high on the agenda of Austrian disability policy. The National Action Plan on Disability (NAP on Disability) 2022–2030 stipulates that children with disabilities shall continue to receive early support and the individual therapies required. Early childhood intervention is the umbrella term for a programme specifically directed at children in their early years and their families that covers medical, psychological and educational aspects. It focuses on the provision of both family guidance and coaching support as well as on the provision of comprehensive support to children with disabilities or children at risk of disability. In this respect, interdisciplinary cooperation among various experts from the fields of psy

chology, medicine, social work, psychotherapy, speech therapy, music therapy and early intervention in therapeutic special needs education (Heilpädagogische Frühförderung) with parents'/guardians' strong involvement, plays an essential role.

Based on the new Agreement between the Federal Government and the Federal Provinces, mentioned above, the standardised nationwide provision of services continues to be ensured and facilitates the achievement of the aforementioned goals and objectives. The objectives pursued under the new Agreement include, for instance, achieving a significant increase in the special-purpose grant as set out in the Government Programme, and the continuation of the compulsory kindergarten year prior to starting school. In the context of the qualitative and quantitative expansion of childcare in Austria, a second compulsory kindergarten year is to be introduced in the medium term. Against this background, the professionalisation and further promotion of cooperation between parents/guardians and kindergarten teachers under the Partnership for Education (Bildungspartnerschaft) approach continue to play an important role. This concept covers "relationship management" between staff and parents/guardians, i.e. staff's work with parents/guardians within the educational institutions attended by their children and includes, for instance, the exchange of information, clarification of mutual expectations, opportunities for parents/guardians to meet, and support for other related social networks. Such Partnerships for Education play a key role when it comes to promoting participation of children at risk of marginalisation and involving their legal guardians. It also ties in with the Federal Government's intention to offer integrative support services as early as possible in children's lives for those affected. This also includes the Early Childhood Intervention Programme (Frühe Hilfen) (please see Chapter 9 Special Topic "Family and Youth"), which offers guidance and makes an important contribution to empowering and fostering parents' and guardians' competences (see Chapter 6 Key Service "Healthcare").

With regard to the quality of early childhood education, Austria plans to establish standardised nationwide quality assurance strategies and quality standards in human resources development as well as in the field of education, in-service training and professional development of teaching and assistance staff. In this context, bilingual and multilingual educational institutions set up and operated by the national minorities are also to be taken into account and the training of early childhood educators is to be reformed. Service coverage is being expanded, with a special focus on extending opening hours and making them more flexible as well as creating additional places for children under the age of three. In terms of early language support, the aim is to develop and implement a standardised support concept by combining the existing concepts established in the nine federal provinces, transparent criteria for the allocation of resources and the mandatory requirement for all early childhood educators to complete training and acquire the necessary skills in accordance with the training course in early language support (Federal Government, 2021b).

Significant support for implementing the projects aimed at improving the framework conditions in early childhood education, as set out in the Government Programme, will come from the Technical Support Instrument (TSI) funding option made available by the European Commission. In the context of the TSI flagship project on the European Child Guarantee, the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research has been awarded funding for the project “Improving staff working conditions for better quality in early childhood education and care in Austria”. Having a scheduled term of up to 24 months, the project seeks to develop a strategy that will enable a standardised nationwide approach to counter staff shortages, standardise framework conditions, ensure better quality in early childhood education establishments and thus guarantee children’s right to affordable and high-quality early childhood education and care. The aim is to develop a better understanding of the status quo and the underlying reasons for existing challenges and framework conditions as well as a shared vision among all stakeholders of possible measures and instruments for political and legislative action that are to culminate in the preparation of a concrete implementation strategy and/or a nationwide action plan. Another goal pursued under this approach is to promote and strengthen the general recognition of the profession of early childhood educator in society as well as to foster appreciation of early childhood education and to increase the attractiveness of the profession in general.

In addition, the Federal Government seeks to increase diversity among early childhood educators through relevant steering activities. The aim is not only to increase the share of male early childhood educators, persons with a migrant background and persons who alongside German are also proficient in a language spoken by an ethnic group, but also to examine opportunities for increasing the number of persons with disabilities undergoing training as early childhood education and care (ECEC) educators. With a view to ensuring the rapid further expansion of high-quality educational places in ECEC institutions and to improve the professional staff-child ratio, Austria seeks to swiftly launch an ECEC training initiative. Other measures planned include nationwide standardisation of pedagogical training for assistance staff, creating new training options for career changers, and promoting and expanding tertiary ECEC training in the long-term so as to ensure sustainable improvement of the general framework conditions in this professional field.

With a view to successfully implementing the European Child Guarantee in Austria, two specific, quantifiable targets are to be achieved by 2030. Firstly, in the area of participation, the new 2022 Barcelona Target for children under the age of three (for Austria: 31.9%), is to be achieved or even exceeded by increasing their ECEC enrolment rate from currently 32.1% (including registered childminders) to 40%. Secondly, children’s linguistic skills are to be improved through increased early linguistic support. The effect of linguistic support is to be assessed based on performance indicators specified in the Agreement between the Federal Government and the Federal Provinces. Efforts are directed at reducing the share of children with a specific need for language support

at the end of their early childhood education in ECEC facilities by 30%. With a view to achieving this goal, additional funding (500 million euros) from the Future Fund will be available for ECEC until 2028, starting with the 2024 financial equalisation.

Objectives: Early childhood education and care

	Objective	Indicator	Source	Baseline	Interim target 1	Interim target 2	Target 2030
1	<b>Meeting the Barcelona Target</b>	ECEC enrolment rate among 0 to 3-year-olds (incl. registered childminders)	Day care centre statistics Statistics Austria (2023)	32.% (2022/23)	/	/	40%
2	<b>Strengthening early language support</b>	Reducing the share of children in a cohort who have a specific need for language support at the end of their enrolment in an ECEC establishment	Impact assessment based on the Agreement under Article 15a of the Federal Constitutional Law on early childhood education	Reduction by 30% (2019)	/	/	Reduction by 30% (2030)



## 4 Key Service “Inclusive Education and School-based Activities”

### Baseline, political framework and allocation of responsibilities

It should be noted that there is compulsory schooling in Austria and that all public school programmes and school-based activities are accessible to all children and young people living in Austria. Compulsory education is enshrined and regulated in the Federal Constitution (Federal Constitutional Law)<sup>9</sup>. All children who are long-term Austrian residents are required to attend school. This requirement applies not just to Austrian citizens, but to all children who are long-term residents in Austria, regardless of citizenship. Compulsory education begins on the next 1 September following the child's sixth birthday and lasts for nine school years. If authorised by the competent Regional Board of Education (Bildungsdirektion), children of school age may also complete their compulsory education by taking part in equivalent instruction (gleichwertiger Unterricht), for instance, at a private school that is not open to the general public and/or has not received official recognition which is required if a child is to fulfil compulsory education in that type of school or at home. Responsibility for regulating the education system lies with the Federal Government. The Regional Education Boards in the federal provinces are responsible for all matters related to compulsory education and for enforcing school legislation, the only exceptions relate to the agricultural and forestry school sector and the central educational and teacher training institutions (Zentrale Lehranstalten). The Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research is inter alia responsible for the training of teachers and, alongside the federal provinces and municipalities, for maintaining schools.<sup>10</sup>

The compulsory school sector is divided into Primary Level (primary school, special needs education), Secondary Level 1 / Lower Secondary School (compulsory secondary school, special needs education and academic secondary school lower cycle) and Secondary Level 2 / Upper Secondary School (academic secondary school upper cycle, schools for intermediate vocational education and colleges for higher vocational education, pre-vocational schools and compulsory vocational schools). After having completed secondary education, students may continue their education and attend either post-secondary educational institutions or the tertiary education system (universities, universities of applied sciences and university colleges of teacher education).

The Key Service “Inclusive education and school-based activities” is in conformity with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 28 “Right to education; attendance at

<sup>9</sup> Art. 14 para. 7a Federal Constitutional Law (Bundesverfassungsgesetz, BV-G); §§ 1, 2, 3 Compulsory Schooling Act (Schulpflichtgesetz, SchPflG)

<sup>10</sup> Art. 13 para. 12 Federal Act on the Number, the Powers and the Organisation of Federal Ministries (in brief: Federal Ministries Act) (Bundesministerienengesetz, BMG); section E para. 2, 3 BMG



school; vocational training". It also contributes to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Sustainable Development Goals 1, 4 and 10.

### **Stakeholder participation**

The number of stakeholders in the education sector is diverse and includes teachers, trade unions, parents and student representatives as well as representatives from business, the federal provinces and municipalities. They have the opportunity to voice their concerns in everyday school life or to highlight needs in the school sector, and to contribute to legislative reviews or structural reform projects. By 2030, further measures that will also relate to the key topics addressed in the European Child Guarantee will have been implemented. Under the related activities, review processes seek to ensure the best-possible stakeholder involvement. With a view to launching and implementing comprehensive measures in the school sector to counter the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and to provide the necessary support for pupils and students, a process fostering ongoing coordination and involvement of school sector stakeholders is in place. Consequently, measures planned up to 2030 may contribute to promoting best-possible involvement, for instance in the form of review processes, and are to be evaluated through impact analyses.

### **Existing programmes and measures**

Building on the context of the Austrian school system described above, the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research is currently implementing a series of central programmes and measures aimed at fostering equal opportunities for all pupils/students and continuously improves and updates the framework conditions governing school education and school-related activities (please see Annex "Overview of Measures").

In this spirit, the 2017 Education Reform, which gives teachers and headteachers more room for manoeuvre with respect to teaching, organisational and HR matters, was implemented. This enhanced freedom and scope is subject to careful quality assurance through systematic educational monitoring. Building on an external evaluation of schools, monitoring is conducted on the basis of a standardised quality framework. The reorganisation of the joint, uniform education authority, the Board of Education (Bildungsdirektion), ensures transparency and effectiveness in school administration. In addition, the Council of Ministers adopted the Education Package (Pädagogikpaket) in 2018, which bundles key measures to strengthen and sustainably safeguard pupils'/students' skills. It places a focus on clearly defined school readiness criteria as well as support-orientated diagnostics relevant for school entry and manifesting itself in skills-oriented curricula for primary and lower secondary school. The introduction of a skills and performance potential assessment tool (Kompetenzraster) facilitates teaching, the preparation of performance evaluations and – hand in hand with that – amended

skills assessments enabling the different needs of vulnerable groups of children to be addressed in a more targeted manner and their skills to be promoted accordingly. This process is supported by the introduction of individual skills and potential assessments (individuelle Kompetenzmessung, iKMPLUS) in primary and lower secondary schools, which provide information on progress made by pupils/students in selected skills areas, thus facilitating individualised support based on these findings.

With a view to promoting prevention, the topics of gender-based violence and role stereotypes are also addressed in class. Under the heading of “Reflective Gender Education and Equality” (Reflexive Geschlechterpädagogik und Gleichstellung), the general policy issued by the Ministry of Education in 2018, explicitly requires the responsible school authorities and schools to address the topic of equality and, in particular, to pay special attention to violence and sexism in all its expressions. Alongside organising dedicated in-service training courses for teachers, awareness-raising activities included handouts and teaching materials disseminated at schools as well as violence prevention workshops in schools.

The textbook campaign (Schulbuchaktion, i. e. the provision of textbooks and teaching materials free of charge to pupils/students) is a family and education policy service that seeks to ease the financial burden on parents while at the same time making an important contribution to fostering education and equal opportunities for all pupils/students. Under this campaign, all pupils/students attending Austrian schools have been provided with necessary teaching materials free of charge since 1972. The introduction of the new generation of interactive and multimedia digital textbooks (e-books+) in 2018/19 contributed to further digitalising learning in schools. Increased funding is made available to provide primary school pupils with special educational needs with therapeutic teaching aids.

Pupils/students and apprentices who receive family allowance are granted free travel and/or travel allowances to travel on public transport from their place of residence to school or their place of training and back. If no suitable means of public transport is available, it is possible to have transport with regional transport companies arranged in the individual federal provinces by the Federal Chancellery’s Free Travel/School Books teams. On a needs-based basis, it is possible to arrange transport for distances in excess of two kilometres in each direction, or to conclude cost reimbursement agreements with municipalities that provide such necessary transport themselves. The minimum distance requirement of two kilometres does not apply to pupils/students with disabilities.

To ensure that all pupils/students may benefit equally from the educational opportunities offered by schools, the Education Investment Act (Bildungsinvestitionsgesetz) sets out the goal of providing high-quality, non-discriminatory, inclusive, needs-based, efficient and sustainable, nationwide day care for 40% of children aged 6 to 15 and at

85% of compulsory general education schools. This is to be achieved through further investment in preserving, developing and expanding all-day school types, taking into account existing extracurricular institutional childcare facilities.

In order to ensure that pupils/students are prepared in the best-possible manner for the time after they have completed compulsory schooling, the educational and vocational guidance tool (Bildungs- und Berufsorientierungstool, BBO tool) “Deine Zukunft” (Your Future) was developed. This tool enables pupils/students to get a clearer understanding of their general skills as well as potential future career paths and the subjects they are interested in, thus raising awareness of the next steps to be taken in terms of vocational and/or educational career planning.

To ensure that young people, are equipped with the relevant skills for their future career, the Adult Education Initiative (Initiative Erwachsenenbildung) has also launched free education programmes for people aged 15 and over, enabling them to acquire basic education and the compulsory schooling qualification.

In addition, special remedial instruction is being provided during summer holidays. Introduced in 2020, Summer School is considered a social mandate. Support is offered to pupils/students who need and wish to catch up on school subjects to enhance their performance in the subsequent school year. One of the goals pursued is to consolidate pupils’ proficiency of German as the language of instruction to enable them to follow lessons more easily in the coming school year. Supplementing this offer, the Austrian Integration Fund (Österreichischer Integrationsfonds, ÖIF) provides additional courses directed at parents and guardians whose children attend Summer School (Sommer-schule). In these courses, basic information on the Austrian school system is shared with parents/guardians, who are also informed about the importance of contributing to their children’s educational career and how to best support their children. For children with disabilities, an inclusive and barrier-free support concept was developed and will be available in summer 2022.

### **Challenges, gaps and needs**

Despite a very well-developed school system including modern support measures for vulnerable pupils/students, a number of challenges have been identified, which were discussed in the context of the multi-stakeholder dialogue with UNICEF Austria and in a dedicated break-out session on the Key Service “Inclusive education and school-based activities” (UNICEF Austria, 2022). The participating stakeholders represented non-governmental organisations, federal and province administrations as well as the research sector. They jointly agreed that equal access to high-quality and inclusive education required breaking the cycle of social exclusion being passed-on from one generation to the next and increasing equal opportunities for disadvantaged children. The goal is

thus to undertake the best possible efforts aimed at preventing a segregated school environment and adapting the education sector even better to the different needs of vulnerable pupils, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, which had a disproportionately negative impact on vulnerable pupils/students (Steiner et al., 2021). Furthermore, the generally low level of public resources made available for inclusive education was criticised, which means that those affected are often dependent on financing it themselves. In the context of the implementation of digitalisation in the education system, it was stressed that pupils/students with disabilities required targeted guidance and assistance. Another aspect that was highlighted was the lack of appropriate role models, which could be addressed by recruiting educators with disabilities. Mention was also made of the lack of free all-day school places and that local authorities often fail to draw on the funds available while parents are not aware of the right to such places. The issue of early school leaving was also raised, and participants agreed that this topic deserved even greater attention in education policy, taking into account the socio-economic circumstances of those affected. With regard to health, exercise and nutrition, the importance of educators as role models and the associated improvement of necessary skills and qualifications was emphasised. In terms of health promotion, participants stated that a Health in All Policies (HiAP) approach was also required in school construction and interior design matters, and that school catering services need to be healthier and more sustainable. Finally, it was pointed out that challenges such as threats to the best interests of the child, violence against children and protection of children, especially children with disabilities, received too little attention in the school context and that there was a lack of sufficient guidance and support systems (UNICEF Austria, 2022).

Existing challenges in relation to school education of children with disabilities are already addressed in the NAP on Disability 2012–2020/2021, adopted in 2012, and its evaluation. Both this NAP and the subsequent NAP for the years 2022–2030, define objectives related to education and provide for the development of an inclusive school system. Since 2013, inclusive education has been enshrined in the curriculum for all (future) teachers. The evaluation of the Action Plan conducted in 2020 made it clear that inter alia the school system continued to be characterised by a lack of resources in inclusive education. As already stated in the 2016 interim report: "... the most important measure, namely additional teachers, to actually put inclusion into practice was still lacking" (Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, 2016). What is more, there is still no comprehensive understanding of accessibility. The Action Plan does not refer to physical barriers, for instance in school construction. Social barriers, however, still existed and were characterised by compassion and a benevolent mentality rather than approaches supporting autonomy and inclusion. It was therefore necessary to dismantle these and focus on self-determination and inclusive approaches (Biewer et al., 2020), was the conclusion drawn.

At the same time, it should be noted that in the context of the preparation of this National Action Plan, the federal provinces, associations and non-governmental organisations reported numerous measures which also relate to the target groups addressed by the European Child Guarantee in the field of education, illustrating the valuable services they provide with a view to supporting vulnerable children in the school context (please see Annex “Overview of Measures”).

### **Identified target groups**

With regard to access to educational opportunities and school-related activities, children and young people from socio-economically disadvantaged households, in particular children with a migrant background from certain countries of origin, children from ethnic minorities and children with disabilities – especially those affected by intersectional multiple discrimination and exclusion mechanisms – can be identified as particularly vulnerable groups within the meaning of the European Child Guarantee. The main target group of vulnerable children also includes those children who are particularly affected by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and therefore need to catch up on skills development.

### **Measures aimed at supporting vulnerable children**

When it comes to pupils/students with disabilities, inclusion has already become part of everyday school life and is being further expanded. In this context, it is necessary to consider inclusion as a cross-cutting theme that is enshrined in current and future reform projects and to further raise awareness of its importance. As set out in the applicable legal provisions, parents/guardians of children with special educational needs (SEN) have the right to choose between integrative or inclusive schooling together with peers without SEN in a mainstream school (integrated class/Integrationsklasse) or, if this is not available or accessible, in a special school. Pupils/students concerned are generally supported in achieving the learning objectives of the mainstream school curriculum according to their individual learning abilities. The acquisition of key qualifications and skills empowers pupils/students with SEN to integrate into school and work, participate in society and lead independent lives. A study that is currently evaluating the practice of providing special needs education contributes to utilising resources for specific support services more efficiently and in a more needs-oriented manner.

Furthermore, it will be necessary to ensure sufficient availability of top-quality inclusive education programmes within the next few years. In the process of implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Austria, three inclusive model regions were defined. In these regions, measures aimed at implementing an inclusive school system were developed and tested. Adopted in 2015, the “Binding Guidelines for the Development of Inclusive Model Regions” define the educational, legal

and organisational framework for developing these model regions. The goal pursued is to expand and increase the offer of inclusive learning opportunities at all schools. The findings generated, lessons learned, and the experience gained in putting these model regions into practice will be incorporated into the implementation of the measures set out in the NAP on Disability for the years 2022–2030.

Those children who require further German language support after having already had such support in an ECEC establishment or who enter the Austrian school system as “lateral entrants”, receive intensive support at school through both German support classes and courses to facilitate rapid acquisition of language skills in German as the language of instruction. A particular focus is to be placed on supporting those who, even after having attended two years of German support classes and courses, have not yet acquired the necessary language skills to be able to follow lessons. In order to assist children with a need for support in German as the language of instruction, also outside of school premises and in addition to school-based education, “Learning Cafés” are available throughout Austria. In these establishments, children and young people with a migrant background receive targeted tutoring and support with studying, homework and preparation for exams.

The “8-Point Plan for Digital Learning at Austrian Schools” initiated by the Federal Government and funded with 250 million euros covers all central areas of the education system required for high-quality, future-oriented school operation. Under the current initiative, pupils/students are being equipped with digital devices, whereby a special focus is being placed on the social dimension to ensure all pupils/students are given access to digital education based on the same, equitable conditions. In addition to promoting the acquisition of digital skills and fostering digital learning, this initiative seeks to counteract disadvantages related to social background and gender, opening-up equal opportunities for all pupils to tap into. Along the same line, the “Digital School” initiative fosters teachers’ digital skills so to enable them to fully focus their attention on pupils and on teaching digital content and skills.

Since 2012, repeated educational standards assessments and PISA surveys have shown that some 15 to 25% of pupils have inadequate basic skills in German (reading and writing), maths and English. The “Ensuring Basic Skills” (Grundkompetenzen absichern) project focuses on primary and compulsory secondary schools where at least 20% of pupils have not achieved the required results in the educational standards tests and whose general school results are below the expected outcome. This project not only takes into account pupils’/students’ socio-economic background but also compares only schools in similar settings.

Seeking to foster equal opportunities and equality, the Austrian legal system enables the provision of financial support for continued education as well as accommodation

for pupils/students in school dormitories or other accommodation outside their parents' place of residence and preparation for final examinations at schools for working people. As set out in Austrian law, "study grants and educational allowances" are awarded to pupils/students in socio-economic need, depending on income, marital status and family size of the pupils or their legal guardians.

The National Strategy on Preventing Early Leaving from Education and Training (Nationale Strategie gegen frühzeitigen (Aus-) Bildungsabbruch) focuses on effective measures with respect to prevention and intervention as well as compensation. The youth coaching programme operated by "Sozialministeriumservice" (Federal Social Welfare Office) is a key measure against early school leaving. This Austria-wide support programme is directed at young people at risk of exclusion who have completed compulsory schooling. Under this programme, advice, guidance and case management is provided to raise young people's awareness of future vocational and educational paths. Furthermore, a wide range of reform measures, launched by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, and the counselling services provided in the context of school-based support systems also contribute to minimising the number of school dropouts.

The "Ready for School" (Schulstartklar!) project, implemented by the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection and co-financed by the European Fund for Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) and the ESF+ facilitates basic material support in the form of vouchers for school supplies to counter material deprivation among pupils living in households receiving needs-based minimum income or social assistance. Of the vouchers issued in 2022, more than 43,000 were used, equalling a take-up rate of 90 %.

Austria's commitment to respecting and promoting ethnic groups living in Austria is enshrined in the Federal Constitution. Ethnic groups are an enrichment and living together in multilingual regions enjoys a centuries-old tradition in Austria. In this respect, the school system plays a key role in ensuring ongoing, consistent positive development. Their right to formal childcare from the age of three until entering primary education as well as early childhood education up to the age of three (Elementarbildung) in their national minority's language is guaranteed in the Federal Constitution to the members of the Slovene and Croatian national minorities in Carinthia, Styria and Burgenland (Art. 7 para. 2 Austrian State Treaty of Vienna). The constitutional provisions of Art. 1 Act on School Education for Ethnic Minorities in Burgenland (Minderheitenschulgesetz, RMindSchG Bgld) and Art. 7 Act on School Education for Ethnic Minorities in Carinthia (Minderheitenschulgesetz, MindSchG Ktn) also provide for the right to use the Croatian or Hungarian language in Burgenland or the Slovene language in Carinthia as the language of instruction in certain areas and in certain schools or to learn Croatian/Hungarian/Slovene as a compulsory subject.

As set out in the minority school acts for Carinthia and Burgenland, the languages listed alongside German as language of instruction in bilingual schools are Slovene in the Province of Carinthia and Croatian (as spoken in Burgenland) as well as Hungarian in the Province of Burgenland. In these federal provinces, pupils may thus make use of this offer at the respective schools. Ongoing reform efforts are directed at creating optimal framework conditions for also achieving a high level of language proficiency in the respective national minorities' languages. Furthermore, extra-mural projects relating to education in the national minorities' languages and not covered by the minorities school acts are supported under the Programme for the Promotion of the National Minorities, launched by the Federal Chancellery.

Knowledge and proficiency of German as the language of instruction as well as the gradual development of academic language skills in all subjects form the basis for participation in all educational processes. German language skills therefore constitute not only essential prerequisites for success at school and later integration into the labour market but also for participation in political, economic, cultural and social life in Austria. Efforts are therefore directed at the best possible promotion of children's and young people's German language skills as key to successful integration, thus providing them with the necessary equipment to embark successfully on their future educational paths. Austria is also committed to promoting children's first languages. In this spirit, the current Government Programme sets out that in the process of school enrolment even more awareness is to be raised of first language teaching and that the inclusion of language teachers into schools' permanent core teaching staff is to be further promoted. Since 2016, the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research has also intensified psychosocial support in schools through Mobile Intercultural Teams (MIT). Multilingual psychologists and social workers work with pupils and parents and provide advice to schools and teachers on integrating "new arrivals" (i. e. children and young people who have recently joined a class). Currently, these teams are part of the psychosocial support staff at schools, whose services are to be rolled out across Austria starting in 2022.

With a view to mitigating the impact, the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the school system, the Federal Government is making available additional funding for schools in the 2020/21 and 2021/22 school years. The programmes thus funded are to benefit especially those pupils who have particularly large learning deficits due to the pandemic and are directed at school locations that have a higher need for general support, increased language support and/or face special socio-economic challenges.



## **Objectives and measures under the European Child Guarantee by 2030**

Austria is currently pursuing a number of strategies and projects in the area of inclusive education and school-based activities that contribute towards achieving the objectives of the European Child Guarantee.

Building on a wide range of measures, the Education Package seeks to ensure the sustainable acquisition of skills by pupils. With the introduction of new curricula, the revision and amendment of skills assessment and the planned introduction of the obligation to complete compulsory education (Bildungspflicht), the first results will be available by 2025 and will also be incorporated into the National Action Plan on Implementing the European Child Guarantee under the ongoing evaluation process. In contrast to compulsory schooling, the obligation to complete compulsory education for pupils will not end after having completed nine years of schooling, but rather seeks to ensure that no pupil leaves the education system without having acquired basic skills. The obligation to complete compulsory education will therefore only be considered fulfilled once pupils have acquired all German, English and maths skills that are defined as essential for further education, training and employment, and extends to the age of 18 at the latest. The goal is to provide all young people with the opportunity to successfully complete Secondary Level II education. Young people who have not yet acquired all of the skills required to meet their compulsory education obligation after having completed their compulsory schooling may thus enrol in relevant educational support programmes.

One of the objectives enshrined in the NAP on Disability 2022–2030 relates to providing not only low-threshold, funded parental education events across Austria that are free of charge and easily accessible but also low-threshold, barrier-free extracurricular youth work projects funded under the Federal Youth Promotion Act (Bundesjugendförderungsgesetz, B-JFG). Furthermore, care in socio-educational facilities is to be inclusive and short-term accommodation services to provide temporary relief to families are to be expanded on an ongoing basis. With a view to reaching out as early as possible to families who have children with disabilities and establishing a comprehensive culture of prevention, cooperation between the social, health and education sectors is to be strengthened.

In the 2020–2024 Government Programme, the Federal Government also defines clear goals relating to the development of needs-based resources for schools and long-term funding. It provides inter alia for increasing school support staff (administrative and psychosocial) as required, and for more support through school social work, school psychology, assistance or administrative staff. This reform is aimed at benefiting disadvantaged school locations in particular. Another priority enshrined in the Government Programme is expansion of all-day schools, focusing especially on a needs-based expansion of all-day school types offering integrated education and care (interlocked approach) also in regions where such services have as yet not been available. Further

more, educational and career guidance for young people is to be improved. A dedicated “educational and career guidance tool” was introduced into the curriculum of the 7<sup>th</sup> grade of schooling in academic secondary schools lower cycle (Allgemeinbildende höhere Schule-Unterstufe) and compulsory secondary schools (Mittelschule) and forms part of the mandatory subject “educational and career guidance”.

Under the “100 Schools – 1,000 Opportunities” development and research programme, schools facing particular challenges that were selected based on an opportunities index, receive support and assistance empowering them to properly address these challenges. Jointly implemented by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research and the University of Vienna, this special programme aims to develop an understanding among these schools regarding the extent to which their approach to special challenges as well as their specific input and use of resources influences their quality.

Another important topic is participatory art and culture education programmes for schools, such as “Kultur:Bildung” (culture:education), “culture connected” and “K3-Projekte. Kulturvermittlung mit Lehrlingen” (culture education directed at apprentices) or the “Österreichs Jugend lernt ihre Bundeshauptstadt kennen” programme (Austria’s youth gets to know their federal capital – i.e. school trip to Vienna, also known as “Vienna Campaign”) programme that enable socio-economically disadvantaged children and young people to participate in important cultural activities. In addition, a school event fund, as provided for in the 2020–2024 Government Programme, was established to enable schools to organise school events.

As the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has seriously impacted everyday school life and severely affected pupils’ mental and physical health, the Council of Ministers adopted the “Emergency Package for Education” (pädagogisches Sofortpaket) on 12 January 2022 to specifically support pupils/students. Starting with the 2022 summer semester, this support package includes the extension of special tutoring lessons, particularly at school locations with increased support needs, the provision of needs-based supplementary lessons to students preparing for the school-leaving examination (Matura) or other final examinations in 2022, and the extension of the studying platform “weiterlernen.at” until the end of 2023 as well as funding for measures aimed at promoting a sense of classroom community and belonging. In the health sector, this package provides for the expansion of low-threshold psychological and psychotherapeutic counselling and treatment for children and young people. Finally, further funding is to be made available for increasing social work services at schools, offering additional sports activities at schools and expanding support to companies that train apprentices (betriebliche Lehrlingsförderung), (Federal Government, 2022a).

As the COVID-19 pandemic also has medium to long-term impacts on pupils’ success at school, further provision of support to pupils will form part of future measures. The target

groups included in the European Child Guarantee will also be considered accordingly. The objective pursued is to provide the best possible support to reduce the impact of the pandemic on this target group, thus reaching the largest number possible of children and young people in need of such support. The resources made available to counter the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are subject to ongoing evaluation and are being adapted to the needs arising in the school system. To date it is not yet foreseeable for how long such measures will have to be taken. Successful measures, such as the schooling allowance (Schülerbeihilfe) or the free textbook campaign are being regularly reviewed and funding made available is adapted accordingly.

With a view to successfully implementing the European Child Guarantee, Austria furthermore seeks to achieve three specific quantifiable targets by 2030:

A key goal pursued by the Federal Government is a reduction in the number of young people who drop-out of education or training to ensure that by 2030 Austria will once again be among the top 10 EU Member States featuring the lowest education or training drop-out rates.

As stipulated in the Government Agreement, the number of places in all-day school types is to be further increased so that pupils receive the best-possible education and support in a school-based context. Services such as healthy and sustainable school meals and drinks, sports and culture-related leisure activities as well as important psychosocial and health support systems are of special relevance also in all-day schools, especially as these go beyond provision of pedagogical or tutoring support related to school education, and benefit vulnerable pupils in particular. The basis for assessment is the additional places created at general compulsory schools and at the lower levels of academic secondary schools. By 2025, a total of 230,000 pupils are to be covered by all-day care and education at school, the current figure for the 2021/22 school year ranges at 193,000 pupils. By 2030, a total of 40% of pupils at general compulsory schools are to have the opportunity to attend all-day care and education at school, and 85% of compulsory general schools are to offer school-based or extracurricular all-day care and education in line with the targets defined in the Federal Law on the Expansion of All-day School Forms (also known as Education Investment Act). This step will also improve the compatibility of family and work life for parents, which will contribute to enabling working women, especially single mothers, to become financially (more) independent. With a view to achieving the target of giving 40% of pupils at general compulsory schools the opportunity to attend all-day care and education (total care rate), around 40,000 additional childcare places are to be created throughout Austria taking account of the ongoing increase in the total number of pupils at general compulsory schools. Special care is to be taken to ensure that particularly vulnerable children benefit from the offer of all-day care and education places. This is to be regulated by

special steering measures, including scholarships or the option of enrolment even if their parents do not work.

Comprehensive support for pupils and a focus on promoting skills, particularly as regards basic skills, is aimed at significantly reducing the share of pupils without adequate proficiency in basic skills. Austria has set itself the goal of reducing this share to 20% by 2030. The percentage of 15-year-old pupils who achieve at most proficiency level 1 on the corresponding PISA proficiency scale is measured using data from PISA 2012 and 2018.

Objectives: Inclusive education and school-based activities

	Objective	Indicator	Source	Baseline value	Interim target 1	Interim target 2	Target 2030
1	Reducing the number of school or training drop-outs	Ranking of EU Member States with respect to share of 18- to 24-year-olds who have not completed Secondary level 1 and are not undergoing training	Eurostat	15 <sup>th</sup> place (8.1%) (2020)	/	/	Among the top 10 in the EU (2030)
2	Expansion of all-day schools	Share of pupils in general compulsory schools who are enrolled in all-day care and education	Definitive staffing plans for general compulsory schools, all-day care and education statistics, Education Investment Act	33.4% (2021/22)	37.5–38.5% (2025/26)	/	40% (2029/2030)
3	Strengthening basic skills	Share of 15-year-olds who achieve at most proficiency level 1 in basic skill “reading”	PISA	24% (2018)	/	/	20% (2030)
		Share of 15-year-olds who achieve at most proficiency level 1 in basic skill “maths”	PISA	21% (2018)	/	/	20% (2030)
		Share of 15-year-olds who achieve at most proficiency level 1 in basic skill “natural sciences”	PISA	22% (2018)	/	/	20% (2030)
4	Increasing level of inclusion	Share of pupils/students with special educational needs enrolled in integrated education at a general compulsory school	Statistics Austria	63.8% (2019/20)	/	/	80%

## 5 Key Service “At least One Healthy Meal Each School Day”

### Baseline, political framework, allocation of responsibilities, stakeholder participation

Health-promoting catering in schools makes an important contribution towards ensuring children and young people grow up healthy. In fact, not only eating habits and taste preferences that will be retained throughout one’s entire later life are being developed at a young age, but children and young people also cover around a third of their daily energy requirements at school. A choice of healthy/health-promoting foods at educational institutions therefore contributes to healthy eating and has educational aspects. Particularly children from vulnerable families benefit from a varied choice that meets children’s nutritional needs. Thus, school catering that provides a choice of healthy/health-promoting and balanced foods is of particular importance. Well thought-out communal meals, such as school meals, can be a tool that supports sustainable and healthy/health-promoting eating behaviour. School meals are part of all-day school types, and their provision is therefore enshrined in the law (Simetzberger et al., 2019).

In principle, it can be stated that there are no standardised legal requirements for school meals in Austria, which means that the availability of at least one free, healthy meal per school day for all pupils within the meaning of the European Child Guarantee is currently not guaranteed across the whole of Austria. There are, however, national recommendations for catering in schools (Austrian recommendation for lunch in schools, “School Catering Checklist”, “Guidelines for School Cafeterias”).

Responsibility for the mandatory provision of lunch at all-day schools, which is, however, not defined as having to be healthy, lies with the respective school provider (please see: Basic Act on the Maintenance of Compulsory Schools, *Pflichtschulerhaltungs-Grundgesetz*). As a rule, the Federal Government, the federal provinces, municipalities or organisations under private law or church law can be school providers. The costs of operating a school canteen are also borne by the school provider. The tendering and awarding of catering services contracts at federal schools is generally the responsibility of the Federal Provinces’ Education Boards, which can assign this responsibility to school management to facilitate the checking of compliance with agreements. For compulsory general schools (primary schools, compulsory secondary schools, special schools), this responsibility is to be assumed by municipalities. The Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research published a circular on school meals in 2012 and recommended consideration of the “School Cafeteria Guideline” as an integral part of cafeteria lease agreements. In this context, it is to be noted that the federal provinces sometimes hold different legal views regarding the binding nature of circulars. In compulsory general schools, school catering is generally financed by the municipalities via financial equalisation, in federal schools via the Education Boards. For the mandatory school meals provided at all-day schools, parents/guardians are generally required to pay a



contribution towards the cost of meals, whereby school providers (entities responsible for maintaining schools) decide on the amount of this co-payment, which must only cover cost at most. Reductions or the application of a staggered scheme that takes account of parents'/guardians' financial situation are also for the school providers to decide. The costs incurred by parents/guardians as well as the share of potential funding may therefore vary depending on school providers and/or federal provinces.

In accordance with the School Organisation Act (Schulorganisationsgesetz, SchOG), catering for pupils at schools offering all-day care and education (or afternoon care) is considered part of the recreational aspects of day care and must be provided by teachers, educators, recreational teachers (Freizeitpädagog:innen) or other persons qualified to provide day care on or outside the school's premises.

Lunch is generally not provided for pupils who attend school for half a day.

There is no collective documentation on the number and/or share of pupils who receive school meals. In the 2021/22 school year, a total of 193,018 pupils, or 27.4% of all pupils at compulsory general schools and in the lower cycle of academic secondary schools, attended an all-day school and thus benefited from compulsory school meals. According to the relevant records, a total of 146,037 pupils, or 25.2% of all pupils at compulsory general schools, used the option of after-school care and would therefore potentially also have had a health-promoting school meal in the school year 2021/22. This means that around 58% of all compulsory school locations offer all-day schooling/school-based care and therefore a healthy / health-promoting school meal. As outlined in Chapter 4 Key Service "Inclusive education and school-based activities", the Federal Government has set itself the goal of increasing the share of pupils in all-day school types, which is expected to lead to an increase in the number of pupils who receive at least one healthy meal per school day.

The stakeholder structure outlined in Chapter 4 Key Service "Inclusive education and school-based activities" is also applied to addressing practical aspects relating to the provision of school meals and school catering.

As the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection's scope of responsibilities includes health promotion related to children's nutrition, there are also links between its area of activity and the topic of healthy school meals. The Ministry is therefore actively involved in developing principles, recommendations and measures aimed at healthy eating in schools. Of particular relevance in this respect are national recommendations as part of the Austrian Health Goals, the health promotion strategy pursued under the Federal Target-based Governance Agreement (Zielsteuerungsvertrag), the child and youth health strategy, the charter of the Austria-wide initiative "Children eat healthily" (Kinder essen gesund) launched by the Austrian Public Health Institute (Fonds

Gesundes Österreich, FGÖ), the National Nutrition Action Plan (Nationaler Aktionsplan Ernährung), the National Nutrition Commission (Nationale Ernährungskommission), the “Healthy eating from the start” (Richtig essen von Anfang an!, REVAN) programme and the National Action Plan for Sustainable Public Procurement of the Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology. The Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection inter alia makes recommendations, provides checklists and guidelines and contributes to various projects aimed at optimising school catering. Another key area of activity is the harmonisation of recommendations.

The provision of “healthy school meals” contributes to the implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular to Sustainable Development Goals 2, 12 and indirectly to Goals 1, 4, 10 and 13. Under its 2025 Global Nutrition Targets, the World Health Organisation has also defined the goal of ensuring that there is no increase in childhood overweight or obesity by 2025. “Healthy school meals” is also in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, in particular Articles 3 “Best interests of the child”, 18 “Responsibility for the best interests of the child”, 24 “Preventative healthcare” and 27 “Right to social development/securing the recovery of maintenance”.

### **Existing programmes and measures**

In view of the fact that the provision of a healthy/ health promoting range of foods and drinks makes a significant contribution to equitable access to healthy nutrition, especially for pupils from vulnerable families, the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection provides detailed aids and assistance aimed at implementing this goal. With a view to preventing negative developments in the field of communal catering at schools, the Ministry thus published a nationwide recommendation on healthy catering in schools. Important steps towards improving communal catering that have been realised in recent years include the development of the “School Cafeteria Guideline” (Schulbuffetrichtlinie), the National Recommendations for Lunch in Kindergarten and School<sup>11</sup>, prepared by the National Nutrition Commission (Nationale Ernährungskommission, NEK) (please see Chapter 8 Key Service “Healthy nutrition”) and the Checklist for School Catering, which sets out criteria covering the entire school day, is primarily directed at school providers as entities that maintain schools and has also been adopted by the National Nutrition Commission.

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<sup>11</sup> The recommendations serve as a guideline for developing menus, provide guidance for ordering meals and/or for preparing invitations to tender for catering services. Please also see [https://www.sozialministerium.at/dam/jcr:9528c2f6-a8f0-41f5-bf6b-676cd2b4c397/%C3%96sterreichische%20Empfehlung%20f%C3%BCr%20das%20Mittagessen%20in%20der%20Schule\\_BMSGPK%20CD.pdf](https://www.sozialministerium.at/dam/jcr:9528c2f6-a8f0-41f5-bf6b-676cd2b4c397/%C3%96sterreichische%20Empfehlung%20f%C3%BCr%20das%20Mittagessen%20in%20der%20Schule_BMSGPK%20CD.pdf)

The 2011 “School Cafeteria Guideline” helps school cafeterias in putting together a healthier offer of foods and drinks. Seeking to give pupils/students the opportunity to choose healthy food from an attractive range every day, the “School Cafeteria Guideline” defines how to put together and present a healthy choice of foods and drinks in an attractive manner. Under this Guideline, limits are, for instance, defined with respect to the sugar content in certain foods, such as dairy products, and drinks. In a circular on tenders for school cafeterias, the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research recommends the “School Cafeteria Guideline” be taken into account with regard to the criteria for making healthy choices. The Federal Province of Styria has already included the Guideline into its tender criteria for the provision of a healthy range of foods and drinks, in the other federal provinces consideration is still voluntary (Hofer et al., 2015).

In the context of the “Healthy Eating from the Start” (Richtig Essen von Anfang an! / REVAN)<sup>12</sup> programme (please see Chapter 8 Key Service “Healthy eating”), a “Self-assessment Checklist” was developed for the implementation of healthy/health-promoting catering in schools, which was also adopted by the National Nutrition Commission. It provides an overview of ways to optimise catering in everyday school life. Even when no lunchtime catering is offered, healthy catering can become an integral part of everyday school life (e.g. in the classroom, at school events).

Pursuing the goal of further supporting the implementation of healthy catering services in childcare facilities and schools, a dialogue event was organised at the beginning of 2020 at which 140 participants, including representatives from school providers/authorities that maintain schools, managers of educational and care facilities, caterers, kitchen managers and staff, teachers, student representatives, parent representatives and many more from all over Austria, used the opportunity for networking.

### **Challenges, gaps and needs**

With a view to the provision of at least one healthy/health-promoting meal per school day, the different responsibilities, obligations and forms of financing outlined at the beginning, pose a substantial structural challenge to the availability of such an offer. Currently, there is no legal obligation to apply the quality standards developed by the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection. The “School Cafeteria Guideline” recommends that the concrete implementation of the standards in the respective areas is to be ensured by the responsible bodies in the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research and those who maintain the educational institutions,

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<sup>12</sup> “REVAN” is a programme developed jointly by the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, the Agency for Health and Food Safety GmbH (AGES) and the Umbrella Organisation of Austrian Social Insurance Institutions and seeks to provide information on healthy nutrition for children and parents.



for instance through related special-purpose grants or legal requirements (Hofer et al., 2015). The Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection is working on overcoming the organisational challenges in order to consistently improve the control, acceptance and quality of communal catering, whereby a large number of stakeholders and companies is to be involved in this process.

Numerous professional groups are involved in catering for children and young people at schools. The tendering and awarding of catering as well as the procurement of food and its preparation are levers for improving school catering. To that effect, the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection provides a School Catering Checklist that is easy to use in daily practice. This checklist and the Austrian Action Plan for Sustainable Public Procurement (Österreichischer Aktionsplan für nachhaltige öffentliche Beschaffung, naBe-Aktionsplan), as well as the “School Cafeteria Guideline” that is currently being revised with a special focus on sustainability aspects, are to be used as a legally binding basis for the tendering and awarding and/or organisation of school catering.

In 2016, a survey of the catering situation for 2.5 to 6-year-olds was conducted at institutional childcare facilities (kindergartens and mixed-age facilities) in Austria, in which 75% of the facilities took part. The focus was on aspects of lunchtime catering, such as the type of catering and the consideration of relevant quality standards and guidelines for communal catering. Regarding the catering situation in schools, comparable data has not yet been collected. With a view to gathering more detailed information on the current state of healthy food provided by school caterers, it would be necessary to conduct regular surveys involving selective monitoring.

In the context of the multi-stakeholder dialogue with UNICEF Austria, discussions in the break-out session on “School education, school services and healthy school meals” focused in detail on healthy school meals as an effective measure for access to healthy and sustainable nutrition for all pupils. Participants, involving representatives of non-governmental organisations, federal and province administrations as well as social insurance institutions, came to the conclusion that there was a lack of comprehensive regulations on advertising, food labelling and compliance with standards for community catering. In fact, healthy eating habits and purchasing behaviour depend very much on parents’ relevant knowledge and income. Therefore, it was on the one hand necessary to focus on improving information sharing and knowledge transfer and, on the other hand, to facilitate low-threshold access to healthy food for low-income families. Furthermore, it was highlighted that the quality of school meals depends heavily on the respective school location. A point of criticism was the lack of healthy alternatives offered in schools and leisure centres. Participants agreed that it was thus essential to pay more attention to providing a healthier choice as an easily accessible option and to offer relevant training programmes also to teachers. Further barriers to the provision of healthy school meals

in the whole of Austria consisted in the lack of long-term, nationwide collection and evaluation of data on nutrition in schools, language issues, financial barriers faced by affected families, and a lack of human resources. It was also noted that the provision of general communal catering would represent an appropriate tool to counter the issue of financial barriers for those affected.

### **Identified target groups**

As the provision of at least one meal per school day is only mandatory for those who maintain all-day schools, it cannot be ensured that all pupils at Austrian schools are offered adequate catering and/or an adequate choice of foods and drinks during the school day. With regard to target groups within the meaning of the European Child Guarantee, it may be assumed that children from low-income households or from households with lower nutritional and health literacy count among the most vulnerable groups in this respect.

### **Objectives and measures under the Child Guarantee process up to 2030**

Since 2011, the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection has consistently sought to improve the general quality of communal catering. The mandatory inclusion of its “School Cafeteria Guideline” and the School Catering Checklist in tender criteria for school catering could be considered a key lever in this regard. The Ministry has therefore been consistently undertaking pertinent steps that also include developing relevant documents, such as the background document to the School Catering Checklist that seeks to foster the implementation of these criteria in daily practice.

In order to give the many stakeholders in the areas of child protection, children’s health and nutrition that are relevant to society as a whole, the opportunity to voice their needs and raise concerns, the number of (inter-)sectoral multi-stakeholder events has been stepped up. Seeking to enhance interlinking and pooling of expert knowledge and evidence in this regard, such events remain an essential element in projects and programmes launched by the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection. In the context of its efforts aimed at making the “School Cafeteria Guideline” a fixed criterion of all related tender processes, the Ministry developed comprehensive tailored documents, such as the School Catering Checklist. Under the “EU Joint Action BestReMaP” project, in which the Ministry contributes to the work package on public tenders, an intersectoral workshop was held in January 2022, in which Ministry staff dealt with developing tendering and procurement processes in the EU that place a key focus on health promotion.

Closely associated with these efforts is the Austrian Action Plan for Sustainable Public Procurement that marks an important step towards climate-neutral public administration

and thus towards achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. With regard to catering, the plan is currently applicable to federal institutions and subordinate bodies, such as federal schools, and includes corresponding criteria for the purchase of food (Federal Government, 2021c; Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology, 2021).

In order to further support childcare facilities and schools in setting up a healthy catering service, an initial overview of existing support services was compiled under the “Healthy eating from the start” (Richtig essen von Anfang an!, REVAN) programme. Building on this, the roll-out of best practice examples is planned. The Umbrella Organisation of Social Insurance Institutions is currently piloting a model that is being implemented with the expert support of REVAN and in cooperation with existing stakeholders and community catering initiatives.

In principle, the aim is to ensure that catering services at schools are affordable, attractive, varied and needs-based, involving as many relevant stakeholders as possible, and that they comply with national recommendations. Sustainability criteria are to be considered to the largest possible extent. Food and drinks offered are to be based on the School Catering Checklist, which contains detailed recommendations for school lunches. In addition, all schools are to comply with the requirements set out in the above-mentioned Austrian Action Plan for Sustainable Public Procurement, which is already mandatory for federal schools and contains detailed specifications for procurement of organic products that comply with animal welfare criteria and the “Klimateller” (“climate-friendly plate”, i. e. ensuring that the meal on the plate is climate-friendly) concept.

The 2020–2024 Government Agreement also provides for measures towards improving the general catering situation in schools by, for instance, raising greater awareness about food and nutrition in general. To this end, topics such as food literacy and consumer education are to be incorporated more sustainably into teacher training. Furthermore, the subject “Food literacy and consumer education” is to be introduced into curricula under a school pilot project (Federal Government, 2020).

Austria is very well aware of the challenges it faces with regard to effective and free access to at least one healthy/health-promoting meal per school day and its importance – especially for vulnerable pupils. The recommendation made in the European Child Guarantee could therefore be used as an opportunity to develop by 2030 a broad-based, participatory, cross-institutional and nationwide understanding of the urgently important role it plays. Building on that, the necessary steps and measures can be developed, fully taking into account all related legal, financial, health and social policy aspects. In line with the concept of mutual learning, positive experiences and practical examples shared by other Member States are to be integrated in the related process.

In order to launch such a process – also in the spirit of successfully implementing the European Child Guarantee – Austria seeks to achieve the following two specific goals by 2030:

Firstly, in coordination between the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, as well as the federal provinces and municipalities, the School Catering Checklist is to be included – based on the recommendations made by the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection – as a mandatory award criterion in calls for school cafeteria tenders in all nine Austrian federal provinces by 2030 – and in four federal provinces as early as by 2026.

Secondly, a comprehensive, generally accepted strategy for the nationwide provision of at least one free, sustainable and healthy meal/catering option per school day for pupils attending the relevant types of schools in Austria is to be developed by 2024 and, thirdly, efforts are to be undertaken to enable its operational, nationwide roll-out by 2030. Prior to these dates, lunches already provided in the school system are to be offered largely free of charge.

Objectives: Healthy school meals

	Objective	Indicator	Source	Baseline	Interim target 1	Interim target 2	Target 2030
1	Nationwide implementation of uniform, high quality standards for school catering services	Number of federal provinces in which the School Catering Checklist is a mandatory tender criterion for school cafeterias	Ministry of Science, Education and Research / Education Boards	4 (2021)	/	/	all (9) federal provinces (2030)
2	Ensuring access	Share of schools offering at least one free, healthy/health-promoting meal and/or catering option per school day	Ministry of Science, Education and Research / Education Boards	unknown	Collection of data/development of concept (2024)	/	Total level of implementation 100% (2030)

## 6 Key Service “Healthcare”

The thematic area of “Healthcare” contributes to the implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular to Sustainable Development Goal 3 “Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages” and indirectly to Goal 1 “End poverty in all its forms everywhere” and Goal 10 “Reduce inequality within and among countries”, and is in line with Articles 24 and 27 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on the right to the highest attainable standard of healthcare.



### Baseline

Childhood and adolescence are phases of life in which an important course is set that will also have a significant impact on health in later life. Children’s and young people’s health-related attitudes, capabilities and behaviour are to a large degree influenced by their living conditions (Griebler et al., 2016). It is generally recognised that parents’ income and level of education have an impact on their children’s state of health. In 2018, a total of 38 % of children and adolescents from very affluent families enjoyed excellent health, and only 29 % of children and adolescents from less affluent families (Antosik et al., 2021b). Last year, 24 % of 0 to 17-year-olds living in households at risk of poverty did not receive medical treatment they would have needed<sup>13</sup> (Klimont 2020, own calculation). Childhood poverty and the associated impact on health are determinants of poor health in adulthood (Conroy et al.; 2010; Lee et al., 2021; Raphael, 2011).

There is clear evidence that mental health of children and adolescents in Austria has deteriorated significantly in recent years and that especially mental health problems are on the rise. The multiple crises (inflation, COVID-19 pandemic) have exacerbated the – already – alarming trend of recent years. Vulnerable groups, such as children and young people at risk of poverty or marginalisation, as well as young people with a migration background, are particularly affected (Antosik et al. 2021a; Culen et al. 2021; Haas et al., 2021). Furthermore, overweight and obesity are likewise on the rise. According to a study conducted among more than 700 primary school pupils in Klagenfurt (the capital of the Province of Carinthia), the share of study participants who were overweight or obese increased from 20.7% to 26.2% between September 2019 and March 2021 (Jarnig et al., 2022).

In Austria, access to healthcare provision/benefits in kind is generally very good, which is corroborated by OECD figures according to which 99.9 % of the population has health insurance due to the compulsory insurance system in place (OECD, 2021b). Investment in the health of children and young people lays the foundation for the functioning of future societies and is marked by a particularly high “social return on investment”

<sup>13</sup> Compared with 10% of children from households that were not at risk of poverty

(Fischer/Stanak, 2017). Ensuring that ongoing access to effective and needs-based healthcare services for all is guaranteed and promoting equal opportunities in healthcare for children and young people are therefore of particular concern to the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection.

### **Structures and allocation of responsibilities in the field of healthcare**

A large number of professional groups and institutions provide healthcare services for the Austrian population and a range of different governmental and non-governmental actors are involved in managing and governing the provision of these services. In this respect, the role played by the Federal Government is predominantly of a planning nature. Overall, healthcare planning is based on the principle of "Target-based Health Governance" (Zielsteuerung Gesundheit). The relevant agreement (Federal Target-based Governance Agreement, Zielsteuerungsvertrag) between the Federal Government, the federal provinces and the Umbrella Organisation of Austrian Social Insurance Institutions governs resource-planning, defines strategic goals and seeks to ensure financial sustainability of the Austrian healthcare system. Important priorities set out in this agreement include strengthening the outpatient sector, in particular primary care, as well as measures aimed at improving child and youth health.

On the one hand, operational responsibility for ensuring coverage of and care provided by public hospitals, including hospital outpatient clinics, lies primarily with the federal provinces and the provincial health funds. Coverage of and care provided by the private practice sector, on the other hand, is the responsibility of the Umbrella Organisation of Austrian Social Insurance Institutions.

The Federal Government, the federal provinces, the social insurance institutions and the municipalities hold shared responsibility for prevention and health promotion. In terms of funding, the largest share is contributed by the social insurance institutions (Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 2019).

### **Healthcare benefits and services provided by the Austrian health insurance system**

Persons under the age of 18 who do not earn their own income from gainful employment are covered as "co-insured" by the health insurance held by their parents/legal guardians. Children who receive an orphan's pension or an orphan's allowance are automatically covered by health insurance. In the context of the provision of basic care services (Grundversorgung), i.e. coverage of basic daily needs for foreigners in need of help and protection, to asylum applicants and individuals entitled to subsidiary protection in Austria, these groups are likewise covered by health insurance.

Hospital treatment is generally free of charge for persons who have compulsory health insurance; a small contribution is, however, to be paid per day of care. This requirement does not apply to persons under the age of 18.

Regardless of the respective compulsory health insurance held, outpatient services are free of charge for co-insured children – if the services are provided by an entity that holds a contract with the statutory social insurance institutions (e.g. Statutory Health Insurance/SHI-contracted physicians, SHI-contracted therapists).

Additional out-of-pocket payments may be required for dental treatment. Since 2015, children and young people under the age of 18 have been entitled to free braces or orthodontic alignment treatment if they have a significant misalignment of the teeth or jaws. In addition, children and young people aged 10 to 18 have had the opportunity to take advantage of free oral hygiene since 2018. Out-of-pocket payments may, however, prove problematic for low-income families. Hence, children's dental status still depends on their parent's socio-economic status (Bodenwinkler et al., 2017).

Every year, the Austrian health insurance institutions make available hourly quotas for the provision of psychotherapy free of charge. This has, however, not yet met demand, even though ongoing measures aimed at improving coverage have been taken at various levels. If patients do not get one of these fully funded therapy places and pay for these treatments out of their own pocket, they are reimbursed for a part of the cost of each therapy session. The amount refunded, however, varies depending on the institution they are insured with.

The “emerging healthy from the crisis” (Gesund aus der Krise) support programme was launched to address the actual care needs of children and adolescents. Children and adolescents suffering particular mental stress receive up to 15 funded therapy sessions – in the first project phase due to COVID-19, in the second project phase due to the multiple crises currently being faced.

### **Screening and counselling services for children and young people**

Pupils are examined by a school doctor once a year. In addition, school doctors have a statutory duty to advise pupils on health issues in so far as these affect lessons and school attendance. As medical experts, they assist school management, teachers, staff and other school-related stakeholders on health matters. In the context of pupils' legally required medical examination by school doctors, health challenges can be recognised at an early stage and appropriate interventions can be initiated accordingly. Furthermore, vaccination campaigns in the school context contribute to preventing (the spread of) infectious diseases. The “school medical service” / “school healthcare” system (Schulärztlicher Dienst / Schulgesundheitspflege) is based on cooperation between the

main responsible bodies, the federal provinces and municipalities on the one hand, and the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research and the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection on the other.

In addition, young people between the ages of 15 and 18 who are in employment and hold compulsory health insurance are entitled to an “adolescent check-up” once a year.

School psychologists not only provide pedagogical-psychological counselling support but also provide and coordinate psychosocial support in schools. They are available to all individuals and institutions involved in the school education process, i.e. all pupils of all school types, their parents or guardians, teachers as well as school management and administration.

Once pregnancy has been diagnosed, every pregnant woman resident in Austria receives a “mother-child health passport” (Mutter-Kind Pass), ensuring preventive healthcare for pregnant women and infants up to the age of five. The medical examinations provided for in the “Mutter-Kind Pass” programme serve to enable early detection and timely treatment of diseases and checks to be made on the child’s developmental status. Having these examinations performed during pregnancy and up to the child’s 14<sup>th</sup> month of life is a prerequisite for receiving the full amount of childcare allowance (see Chapter 9 Special Topic “Family and Youth”). This measure seeks to maximise participation in these medical check-ups and encourage people, who are otherwise difficult to reach, to also have these checks performed. Only recently, a reform of the “mother-child health passport” was presented in the context of a Ministerial Council submission. The goal is to develop it into an electronic “parent-child health passport” (Eltern-Kind-Pass), featuring an enlarged portfolio of medical examinations, including extended psychosocial, nutritional and parental counselling as well as additional medical services. A further aim pursued in this respect, is using data collected during examinations for health policy purposes.

Under the “Frühe Hilfen” (Early Childhood Intervention) programmes, needs-based support is provided to families in stressful situations during pregnancy and until the child’s 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday. The programme seeks to promote early childhood development, thus contributing to fostering social equality and health equity. Focusing especially on children from socio-economically disadvantaged homes, early childhood intervention seeks to promote healthy development and ensure that children grow up in an environment free from violence. It includes low-threshold assistance covering the areas of pregnancy counselling, parent education, healthcare, interdisciplinary early intervention, child and youth welfare, early childhood education and other social services. Alongside making available practical day-to-day support, early childhood intervention also contributes to promoting the parenting skills of (expectant) mothers and fathers. Furthermore, early childhood intervention services are directed at preventing or reducing developmental



disorders or delays, and illnesses. Regional early childhood intervention networks are currently active in 65 districts across Austria.

In addition, the Protection against Violence Centres (Gewaltschutzzentren) set up across Austria and funded by the Federal Government, offer advice and support for children, women and men in cases of domestic violence. Since 2004, hospitals have been required by law to set up Child Protection Groups (Kinderschutzgruppen) (Article 8e of the Hospitals and Health Resorts Act). These groups play a central role in processes and procedures related to cases of child maltreatment, child abuse and neglect.

### **Strategies aimed at further promoting child and adolescent health**

In Austria, further development of healthcare, preventive healthcare and health promotion for children and adolescents is essentially based on the Health Targets (Gesundheitsziele) and the Child and Adolescent Health Strategy (Kinder- und Jugendgesundheitsstrategie). Health Target 6 “To ensure conditions under which children and adolescents can grow up as healthy as possible” was developed on the basis of the existing Child and Adolescent Health Strategy and in cooperation with the Committee for Child and Adolescent Health (Komitee für Kinder- und Jugendgesundheit). A Coordination Unit for Child and Adolescent Health (Koordinationsstelle Kinder- und Jugendgesundheit) was also set up at the National Public Health Institute (Gesundheit Österreich GmbH, GÖG) to support implementation. The objectives pursued under Health Target 6 relate to awareness-raising, the earliest-possible provision of support and assistance as well as strengthening the life skills of children and young people.

The overarching goals pursued under the Child and Adolescent Health Strategy are improving health equity, strengthening and preserving health resources, promoting healthy development as early as possible, reducing health risks and increasing awareness of promoting children’s and adolescents’ health in all policy areas.

The 2017–2021 Federal Target-based Governance Agreement (Zielsteuerungsvertrag)<sup>14</sup> provides for the expansion of paediatric palliative care and raising the attractiveness of understaffed professions in the field of psychosocial care of children and adolescents. Furthermore, the number of children not affected by tooth decay (“caries-free”) is also to be increased. Between 2016 and 2019, it was also possible to increase the number of palliative care centres for children and adolescents from 22 to 31 establishments (Antosik et al., 2021c).

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<sup>14</sup> Die sogenannte “Zielsteuerung Gesundheit” wurde zuletzt gemeinsam mit der Finanzausgleichsperiode bis 2023 verlängert.

The Health Promotion Strategy (Gesundheitsförderungsstrategie) developed jointly by the Federal Government, the federal provinces and the social insurance institutions under the Federal Target-based Governance Agreement serves as the basis for the coordinated use of health promotion funds. Measures launched under the strategy inter alia relate to early childhood intervention, promoting healthy crèches and kindergartens, healthy schools, healthy living environments and lifestyles as well as health literacy among young people.

Further points of contact that establish links to the Key Service of healthcare within the meaning of the European Child Guarantee are included in the NAPs on Disability (2012–2020 and 2022–2030), on Nutrition and Physical Activity as well as on Women's Health.

### **Particularly vulnerable groups**

As regards access to healthcare within the meaning of the European Child Guarantee, children and young people who do not have health insurance, including in particular members of the Roma community and refugees, can be identified as particularly vulnerable groups. Children and young people without health insurance cover are exposed to very high health risks. Records of numbers affected are, however, not available.

According to the latest available data, around 0.8% to 1% of the people living in Austria (resident population) are not covered by health insurance. The main reasons for lack of insurance coverage are usually exceptional status transitions, lack of personal resources or information, or that these individuals' residency in Austria is still too short and they are therefore not yet entitled to claim social benefits or support from the Austrian Public Employment Service (Arbeitsmarktservice, AMS), which would include health insurance cover (Fuchs et al., 2017). According to feedback from the facilities that provide medical treatment to people without health insurance cover, this mainly affects children from Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia (often members of the Rom:nja) who have come to Austria with their parents. Care of these individuals is mostly provided by non-governmental organisations. Accompanying scientific research on the early childhood intervention programme addresses health challenges faced by Rom:nja families (Weigl et al., 2021). The findings generated are to contribute to improving the provision of healthcare to this target group (for instance with regard to dental status, weight, respiratory tract, child abuse). With a view to meeting the various needs of the Rom:nja as a target group, Austria is focusing its inclusion efforts primarily on general and structural measures launched in the context of a broader policy towards promoting social inclusion (funding for ethnic groups has been doubled and the Roma Dialogue Platform has been expanded). A central element of the Austrian Roma Strategy is the target group's direct inclusion in developing, implementing and evaluating the envisaged measures. Added to this,

“Combating antiziganism and discrimination through equality” and “Participation of Roma” have been included as new priorities.

Children of refugees or unaccompanied refugee minors are also exposed to high health risks. The psychological consequences of traumatic experiences of war or flight – including gender-specific violence such as rape as a tactic of war – require special attention. Children of asylum seekers who have been issued with multiple negative asylum decisions but are nevertheless staying in Austria, or children of asylum seekers who were granted asylum in another EU Member State but are living with their other parent in Austria, are not covered by health insurance. Additional psychotherapeutic services provided to this group of people are frequently made available by organisations that are financed by donations. Under the “emerging healthy from the crisis” (“Gesund aus der Krise”) programme, low-threshold psychosocial counselling and treatment is made available free of charge also to people with a refugee or migrant background, provided they belong to the eligible age group (children and adolescents from 0 to 21 years of age).

A Council of Ministers submission, presented in January 2023, places a special focus on protecting children and young people from sexual violence.

### **Challenges and gaps in healthcare for children**

Despite a lower COVID-19 prevalence and predominantly asymptomatic or mild disease progression in children and adolescents, they have been significantly affected by the necessary measures taken to contain the pandemic, which severely impacted their daily lives. Closures of childcare facilities and suspension of in-person classroom teaching placed a heavy burden on both parents and children, which the Federal Government was able to alleviate to a certain extent by introducing inter alia a legal entitlement to special care leave (Sonderbetreuungszeit). During a pandemic, socio-economically disadvantaged families struggle with many additional stress factors, including, for instance, the (feared) loss of job and income, which serve to further increase the already high emotional burden. As there are close links between mental health and stress experienced by parents and the stress levels suffered by their children, the burden on children from affected families is significantly higher than among children from less-affected families (Haas et al., 2021). It may thus be assumed that the prevalence of psychological and psychosomatic problems such as depressive symptoms, generalised anxiety, sleep disorders or headaches is increasing. What is more, children and adolescents from families with a low level of parental education, a migrant background or low levels of household income are particularly affected. Such a development is particularly problematic in Austria as the share of over 10-year-olds affected by mental health issues several times a week or even daily, had already increased sharply prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and the provision and availability of mental health services (benefits in kind) does not meet therapeutic needs (Ravens-Sieberer et al., 2021; Antosik et al., 2021a).

The majority of health services used by children and adolescents is provided by office-based physicians in their practices. In cities, these services are predominantly provided by office-based paediatricians; in rural areas, paediatric care is mainly provided by general practitioners. There is clear need for improvement in this respect and to make matters worse, the number of paediatricians who hold contracts with the statutory health insurance institutions is also declining (Antosik et al., 2021c; Kerbl/Voitl, 2018; Voitl, 2022). Young people and families with limited financial resources are, however, particularly reliant on services provided by such doctors. Furthermore, the multi-stakeholder dialogue with UNICEF Austria identified deficiencies in the care of chronically ill children and adolescents in the office-based setting (UNICEF Austria, 2022).

In Austria, data on the health situation of children and adolescents is regularly collected in the context of the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Study (HBSC, Felder-Puig et al., 2019), the Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative (COSI, Weghuber /Maruscak, 2021) and the Austrian Health Interview Survey (ATHIS, Klimont, 2020). The 2016 Child and Adolescent Health Report (Griebler et al., 2016) provides the latest comprehensive compilation of all data sources on child and adolescent health in Austria. Generally speaking, the database in Austria is inadequate. There is a lack of routine data that would provide insights into the health situation and equal opportunities aspects relating specifically to children and adolescents. Data would also be required on prevention and care, and to conduct research on relevant factors that influence health and illness in childhood and subsequently in later adult life. Available data is particularly scarce on 0 to 10-year-olds.

The recommendations made in the report on the multi-stakeholder dialogue with UNICEF Austria (UNICEF Austria 2022) refer inter alia to conducting a regular, comprehensive survey of child health based on the model of the Study on the Health of Children and Adolescents in Germany (Studie zur Gesundheit von Kindern und Jugendlichen in Deutschland, KiGGs), the consistent evaluation of existing data sources based on socio-economic criteria and making better use of data generated by the “mother-child health passport” examinations. Further steps identified to enhance relevant data quality included electronic documentation of epidemiologically relevant health data (such as children’s weight and height), collected in the context of school examinations (Federal Government, 2020), and cross-sectoral coded diagnosis documentation in the entire outpatient sector (please also see Federal Target-based Governance Agreement / “Zielsteuerungsvertrag”).

### **Targets and measures to be taken by 2030**

With a view to further improving and expanding adequate access to high-quality health-care, preventive healthcare and health promotion by 2030, as defined in the European Child Guarantee for all children and adolescents living in the country, Austria has been

implementing a series of key measures and has defined corresponding targets. These efforts are essentially directed at further decoupling children's and adolescents' social background from their state of health, not least by reducing inequalities in healthcare.

In this spirit, the current Government Programme covering the years 2020–2024 provides for a “specialist doctor initiative” (Fachärzt:innenoffensive) focusing on specialist subjects that are understaffed, including especially outpatient paediatric, ophthalmological, and child/adolescent psychiatric care. In the context of “Zielsteuerung Gesundheit” (Target-based Health Governance), measures directed at both making the professional area covered by developmental and social paediatrics more attractive and adding visibility to, strengthening and further developing child and adolescent psychiatric networks are currently being developed. Furthermore, activities aimed at promoting adequate coverage provided by outpatient child and adolescent psychiatrists are currently underway and coverage is to be further improved in the coming years. Against this background, the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection submitted the Second Amendment to the Medical Training Regulation (Ärzteausbildungsordnung, ÄAO) at the beginning of February 2022. The amendment provides for increasing the training ratio in the understaffed specialist medical profession of child and adolescent psychiatry to 1:2. This step will enable more child and adolescent psychiatrists to be trained at the same time, thus leading to a sustainable improvement in the care landscape for children and adolescents.

The “Austrian Healthcare Structure Plan” (Österreichischer Strukturplan Gesundheit, ÖGS) defines planned targets for the provision of paediatric and child/adolescent psychiatric care for the Austrian healthcare regions up to 2025. Another essential element that is to contribute to strengthening outpatient care is the further development of the “mother-child health passport” (Mutter-Kind-Pass) into an electronic “parent-child health passport” (Eltern-Kind-Pass). In addition, the necessary steps have been taken to enable setting up specialised primary care units for children and adolescents<sup>15</sup>.

Current project funding from the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection in cooperation with the Professional Association of Austrian Psychologists (Berufsverband Österreichischer Psycholog:innen BÖP) and the Federal Association of Austrian Psychotherapists (Österreichischer Bundesverband für Psychotherapie, ÖBVP) will enable the provision of additional support services to children and adolescents between the ages of 0 and 21 across all federal provinces. From 2023, the Austrian Health Insurance Fund (Österreichische Gesundheitskasse), as Austria's largest health insurance institution, will make available an additional non-cash benefit of 39,000 specialist psychotherapy hours per year for children.

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<sup>15</sup> Federal Act amending the Primary Care Law and the General Social Insurance Law: [https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokumente/BgblAuth/BGBLA\\_2023\\_I\\_81/BGBLA\\_2023\\_I\\_81.pdf#sig](https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokumente/BgblAuth/BGBLA_2023_I_81/BGBLA_2023_I_81.pdf#sig)

An essential foundation for development prospects, opportunities in life and long-term health is laid in early childhood. For this reason, regional early childhood intervention networks have been set up throughout Austria since the beginning of 2015. The goal is to complete the needs-based nationwide expansion of early childhood intervention services by the end of 2024 (in line with the decision adopted by the Federal Commission on Target-based Governance / Bundeszielsteuerungskommission). To this end, total funding of 15 million euros from the 2020–2026 Austrian Recovery and Resilience Plan is being made available until 2024.

Another measure aimed at supporting and promoting children in the first years of life is the further development of the currently paper-based “mother-child health passport” into an electronic “parent-child health passport”. The goal is to inter alia facilitate reaching-out to and increasing the uptake of the medical examinations – in particular midwife consultations – by (expectant) mothers, especially from disadvantaged groups. In addition, some federal provinces also offer preventive care and screening programmes in kindergartens, including ophthalmological examinations or speech therapy screenings. The planned electronic parent-child health passport will furthermore facilitate analysing examination data for health policy purposes. Further opportunities for developing improved databases on child and adolescent health could be provided by the envisaged Austrian Micro Data Centre.

The Federal Government makes available funding to tackle the psychosocial problems faced by children and young people as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. This includes more than 12 million euros under the “Gesund aus der Krise” (emerging healthy from the crisis) project, which provides low-threshold services to children and young people experiencing psychological stress. The project, which was developed by the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research and the Federal Chancellery, is being implemented by the Professional Association of Austrian Psychologists (BÖP) and the Austrian Federal Association for Psychotherapy (ÖBVP). In this context, funding is also made available to the Working Group of Women’s Health Centres (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Frauengesundheitszentren) to improve psychological and psychotherapeutic treatment for girls and young women. Due to high demand and early exhaustion of funds, the Federal Government decided in October 2022 to extend the project by one year and to increase funding by a further 20 million euros from the beginning of 2023.

The Government Programme also provides for elevating the role and expanding the responsibilities of school doctors, including the use of anonymised data, and setting-up a system of school and community nurses to ensure provision of low-threshold and needs-based care. In cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection is working on the implementation of the “SchulDoc” project to record data collected in

the context of pupils'/students' annual medical examinations at federal schools. Funding for this project is made available under the digitalisation fund managed by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research.

The amendment to the Primary Care Act (Primärversorgungsgesetz, PrimVG), adopted in 2023, facilitates the establishment of primary care units by paediatricians and adolescent medicine specialists, thus leading to further improvements in healthcare coverage.

With a view to better addressing the needs of children and adolescents from otherwise hard-to-reach target groups, new services/measures are to be developed in the fields of health promotion and prevention.

A first step in this direction could consist of developing a comprehensive concept for more structured, multidisciplinary cooperation on health issues in the school setting (medical practitioners, psychologists, social workers, special needs and remedial educators etc.), while at the same time overcoming existing legal obstacles in terms of responsibilities and other related challenges, thus creating sustainable structures for the future. Such an approach could be implemented in the context of school healthcare teams ("Schulgesundheitssteams").

Based on the measures planned, Austria seeks to meet a series of quantitative targets by 2030. The main priority in this context is raising the health status of vulnerable children and adolescents to corresponding levels of those not challenged by social disadvantage by 2030 (Goals 1 & 1a).

Over the last decade, children and young people have been exposed to increasing psychological stress. The multiple crises are further exacerbating this problem. The aim is therefore to improve the mental health of socially disadvantaged children and young people (Goal 2).

With a view to achieving the two goals mentioned above, it is necessary to improve outpatient care for children and adolescents. The Austrian Healthcare Structure Plan (Österreichischer Strukturplan Gesundheit, ÖSG) provides for minimum values per care region for outpatient paediatric care as well as child and adolescent psychiatric care (Goals 3 & 4).

Health-related disadvantages must be countered as early on as possible in life. The nationwide availability of early childhood intervention networks and the introduction of an additional second midwife counselling service under the electronic parent-child health passport are important milestones in this regard (Goals 5 & 6).

By 2030, concrete steps are to be taken to significantly improve data on the health status and care of children and young people. Possible focal points are the health status and health behaviour of 0 to 10-year-olds, which have hardly been recorded to date, outpatient diagnosis coding and research into healthcare coverage, or the observation of cohorts over a longer period of time (Goal 7).

Monitoring and objectives are to be adapted in an ongoing manner to changing circumstances such as better data availability (Goal 8).

Objectives: Healthcare coverage

	Objective	Indicator	Source	Baseline	Interim target 1	Interim target 2	Target 2030
1	Improving health	Share of 0- to 17-year-olds in very good (externally reported) health who are affected by poverty or social exclusion	EU-SILC Module on Children's Health	77.2% (2021)	80% (2024)	/	82% (2027)
1a	Improving health	Share of 11-, 13-, 15- and 17-year-olds from less affluent families <sup>a</sup> in excellent self-reported health	Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC)	26.1% (2022)	29% (2026)	/	32% (2030)
2	Reducing mental health issues	Share of 11-, 13-, 15- and 17-year-olds from less affluent families <sup>a</sup> who rarely or never have one of 4 defined mental health issues (irritability/bad mood, nervousness, difficulty falling asleep, depression)	Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC)	65.3% (2022)	70% (2026)	/	75% (2030)
3	Improving paediatric care	Share of healthcare regions that do not reach the minimum target value defined in the Austrian Healthcare Structure Plan (ÖSG) for paediatric outpatient care units of 0.6 ÄAVE <sup>b</sup> units per 100,000 inhabitants of resident population	National Public Health Institute (GÖG)	34% (2020)	25% (2023)	15% (2026)	10% (2030)



	Objective	Indicator	Source	Baseline	Interim target 1	Interim target 2	Target 2030
4	<b>Expanding psychiatric outpatient care for children and adolescents</b>	Share of healthcare regions that do not reach the minimum target value defined in the Austrian Healthcare Structure Plan (ÖSG) for paediatric and adolescent psychiatric outpatient care of 0.6 ÄAVEb units per 100,000 inhabitants of resident population	National Public Health Institute (GÖG)	41% (2020)	30% (2023)	20% (2026)	10% (2030)
5	<b>Rolling-out early childhood intervention</b>	Number of districts with Early Childhood Intervention Networks	Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection	71 (2022)	all (116) districts (2024)	/	/
6	<b>Making better use of mother-child health passport services</b>	Share of pregnant women who make use of midwife counselling under the mother-child health passport (electronic parent-child health passport from 2026)	Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection (documentation of electronic parent-child health passport)	38% (2020)	/	/	50% (2030)
7	<b>Improving data situation</b>	Improvements in the availability and quality of data on child health could be achieved by merging existing data systems, collecting data in existing structures or creating a new regular survey. Necessary steps are to be evaluated and implemented by 2030.					
8	<b>Further development of child and youth health status monitoring</b>	Support future measures based on extended monitoring, identification of problem areas and development of objectives and topics to be addressed in the context of the participatory process up to 2030; examine the possibilities arising from the further development of databases.					

<sup>a</sup> Those 20% of respondents who achieved lowest scores on questions related to household income/family affluence

<sup>b</sup> ÄAVE – outpatient medical care units with on-duty physicians (ärztliche ambulante Versorgungseinheiten)



## 7 Key Service “Healthy Nutrition”

The topic of “nutrition” is in line with Articles 24 and 27 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which standardise the right to healthy nutrition, and contributes to the implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Sustainable Development Goals 2 and 3 and indirectly Goals 1, 10, 12 and 13.

### Baseline

Children’s and young people’s health depends to a large extent on their living conditions and lifestyle, which is also marked and characterised by socio-cultural influences. In order to live as long as possible in good health, it is therefore essential to ensure that these factors are as health-promoting as possible.

In 2018, a total of 18% of 11 to 15-year-olds in Austria were overweight or obese. In the 2019/2020 survey year, the share of 8-year-olds who were overweight or obese amounted to 25.0% for boys and 23.6% for girls. In the vast majority of cases, children and adolescents who suffer from overweight or obesity carry this condition into adulthood (WHO, 2018). Overweight and obesity in adulthood are associated with a number of secondary diseases, such as type 2 diabetes mellitus, cardiovascular disease, dementia and certain cancers (OECD, 2019).

Overweight and obesity also have an impact on educational outcomes. More frequent absenteeism (Li et al., 2012; Pan et al., 2013; Carey et al., 2015), poorer academic performance and more frequent repetition of school grades have been observed in pupils / students affected by obesity (Anderson/Good, 2017).

### Allocation of responsibilities, framework conditions

The legal and strategic responsibility for ensuring healthy nutrition for the population lies with the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, which cooperates closely with the Austrian National Health Institute (Gesundheit Österreich GmbH, GÖG), the Austrian Agency for Health and Food Safety (Österreichische Agentur für Gesundheit und Ernährungssicherheit, AGES), the federal provinces and numerous other organisations active in this area.

Taking into account international guidelines (EU, World Health Organisation – WHO) and the results of national needs and risk analyses, the National Food and Nutrition Commission (Nationale Ernährungskommission, NEK) identifies and evaluates possible areas for action, and submits proposals to the Federal Health Minister as a basis for the strategic, target group-specific and setting-oriented further development of measures.

AGES is responsible for ensuring food security in Austria. Building on nutrition-related prevention, it has set itself the goal of reducing malnutrition, dietary excesses and undernourishment, and reversing the trend of rising overweight and obesity figures. Pursuing the goal of preventing nutrition-related diseases, the AGES Centre for Nutrition & Prevention shares its expert knowledge, including in the form of target group-specific information such as brochures, lectures, workshops and by implementing and evaluating prevention measures.

Nutritional issues are closely linked to the areas of preventive healthcare and health promotion. At federal level, these issues are dealt with by the Austrian Health Promotion Fund (Fonds Gesundes Österreich, FGÖ), a national research and planning institute for the health sector. The federal provinces finance health promotion and prevention projects through their respective health promotion funds. The largest volume of funding in this segment is provided by social insurance institutions (Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 2019).

On the topic of nutrition in educational institutions, please see Chapter 5 Key Service “Healthy school meals”.

### **Strategies, programmes, services**

The strategic framework for the health aspects of nutrition is provided by the National Action Plan on Nutrition, the Austrian Health Targets and the Health Promotion Strategy under the Federal Target-based Agreement (please see Chapter 6 Key Service “Healthcare”). Health Goal 7 “Provide access to a healthy diet for all” is the relevant goal defined for the field of nutrition.

The Child and Adolescent Health Strategy (Winkler et al., 2017) aims to promote healthy eating among children and adolescents. With a view to achieving this goal, the focus was placed inter alia on nutritional counselling during pregnancy and after birth, and on the expansion of baby-friendly hospitals.

The key goals defined under the NAP on Nutrition, published in 2013, is reduction of malnutrition, overnutrition and undernourishment as well as a reversal of the rise in cases of overweight and obesity. Specifically, better availability of healthy food, optimisation of the choice of foods and drinks offered in communal catering and the food service industry as well as accompanying marketing activities are highlighted as key areas of action towards better nutrition. The latest NAP on Nutrition is envisaged for 2023.

“Healthy eating from the start” (Richtig essen von Anfang an!, REVAN) is a cooperation programme between the Federal Government and the Umbrella Organisation of Social Insurance Institutions in place since 2008. In cooperation with the Austrian Health

Insurance Fund (Österreichische Gesundheitskasse), a science-based information programme directed at pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers and parents is made available across Austria. Practical information, assistance and up-to-date information on the topic of “nutrition during pregnancy and breastfeeding, during complementary feeding and in infancy as well as for children aged 4 to 10 years” is shared in workshops and nutrition-related events free of charge with (expectant) parents, relatives and interested individuals. In this context, great importance is attached to preventive approaches relating, for instance, to communal catering and product optimisation. The goal is to positively influence children’s eating habits through measures aimed at improving living conditions.

### **Target groups, challenges and gaps related to nutrition among children and young people**

As eating habits are difficult to change once they have been acquired, it is necessary to raise awareness of the importance of a healthy diet among even the youngest children. Infants and children up to the age of 10 are therefore a particularly important target group, including in the NAP on Nutrition. The fact that living conditions play an important role and are a very relevant factor for healthy body weight is reflected in the higher share of children affected by overweight or obesity in households with lower levels of income or formal educational qualifications (Weghuber/Maruszczak, 2021). Low-income families are often unable to afford a healthy diet. Additional risk factors are comparably less healthy diets of parents/families, but also lower participation in social life, social exclusion, isolation, financial worries and stress experienced by parents and children themselves. Over the last two years, many of these factors have been exacerbated by the measures taken to counter the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. School closures and lockdowns have, however, also adversely impacted other risk factors, such as increased screen time, insufficient physical activity, irregular sleeping patterns and more frequent snacking. A large number of international studies have shown that the incidence of overweight and obesity in children has increased in the aftermath of the pandemic (Stavridou et al., 2021). In another study covering 764 primary school pupils from the Province of Carinthia, a stronger increase in body mass index (BMI) that went hand in hand with a decrease in cardiorespiratory fitness was observed during the pandemic (Jarnig et al., 2021).

International studies have, furthermore, shown that children and adolescents from socially disadvantaged families are also more exposed to “unhealthy” food marketing (Backholer et al., 2020) and on average display significantly unhealthier dietary patterns than those from more socially privileged families (Moosburger et al., 2020). With a view to reducing specific marketing activities for foods with a high content of energy, fat, sugar and salt (High in Fat, Salt and Sugar, HFSS) directed specifically at children, the “Austrian Nutrient Profile for the Guidance of Food Advertising to Children in Audio

visual Media” (Österreichisches Nährwertprofil zur Lenkung von Lebensmittelwerbung an Kinder in Audiovisuellen Medien) was developed under the “Healthy eating from the start” (Richtig essen von Anfang an!, REVAN) programme and adopted by the National Food and Nutrition Commission (Nationale Ernährungscommission, NEK) in 2021.

It has also become clear that disadvantaged groups of persons cannot be reached to a sufficient extent by the regular REVAN workshop format. In fact, half of the workshop participants surveyed in the context of the 2020 evaluation held a university degree or a degree from a university of applied sciences – although this group makes up only a small share of the overall population. For this reason, one field of action defined for the five-year REVAN strategy is dedicated to the topic of increasing target group-oriented accuracy in order to reach more vulnerable groups. In the breakout session on “nutrition”, held in the context of the multi-stakeholder dialogue with UNICEF Austria (UNICEF Austria, 2022), participants came to the conclusion that there was a lack of target group-specific communication of health information and that the transfer of knowledge focused too much on parents/guardians and too little on children, young people and educators.

Attention was also drawn to the fact that data on children’s nutritional behaviour and the associated illnesses (please see Chapter 6 Key Service “Healthcare”) is only fragmented. Participants furthermore highlighted the lack of data, especially as regards the youngest age groups, and the lack of regular surveys.

### **Targets and measures to be taken by 2030**

The NAP on Nutrition is currently being updated. Building on the work carried out thus far under Health Goal 7, it will set out a comprehensive strategy covering the entire nutrition system for the next few years.

With respect to the further development of REVAN, the following three fields of action will enjoy priority for the 2021–2025 period: promotion of breastfeeding, community catering and provision of targeted information services.

National and international specialist associations recommend promoting breastfeeding as the natural and preferred form of nutrition for infants. Breastfeeding and early childhood nutrition make an important contribution to children’s health, including with respect to preventing obesity from the very outset. As reported by mothers, however, almost every second breastfed child receives infant milk formula, sugar water, water, tea or other (baby) food in the first few days. In this respect, higher maternal income is associated with a longer period of exclusive breastfeeding (Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 2021b). Supporting breastfeeding is one of the most effective and cost-efficient health promotion and preventative health measures. It is therefore important to create structural and social framework conditions that give all

women the opportunity to breastfeed in all areas of life. What is also important in this context is better compatibility of breastfeeding and work, creating a sufficient number of available and appropriately equipped breastfeeding facilities in public spaces and making sure that breastfeeding is considered as something inherently normal by society<sup>16</sup>. Under its dedicated work programme on “Infants, pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers”, the NEK working group will develop “Fields of action and measures to support breastfeeding” in cooperation with REVAN in 2022/23.

The Quality Standards for Catering in Kindergartens (Qualitätsstandard für die Verpflegung im Kindergarten) – that also includes a special section on appropriate catering for children in crèches – is a tool that supports implementation of health-promoting catering in childcare facilities, may serve as a useful basis for tenders and is aimed at all staff involved in catering in childcare facilities. These quality standards are significantly more comprehensive and define stricter criteria than the existing “Austrian recommendations for lunch in kindergartens” (Österreichischen Empfehlungen für das Mittagessen im Kindergarten), which were adopted by the NEK and define minimum standards for the type of food and drinks for lunchtime catering and how often such food and drinks are to be offered. It is planned to make the Quality Standards legally binding requirements for catering in kindergartens.

Measures aimed at improving catering at schools are presented in Chapter 5 Key Service “Healthy school meals”.

With a view to reaching out to disadvantaged groups of people by raising greater awareness of REVAN, the REVAN regional partners have started in recent years to develop additional programmes featuring specifically adapted formats. In addition, a coordinated national approach is to be launched that will include joint adaptation and further development of the REVAN information programmes to promote outreach to target groups. In order to enhance accessibility of nutritional content, especially for vulnerable people, the existing REVAN programme will be further developed – involving both primary and secondary target groups (especially experts from the fields of social work, early childhood intervention, poverty research, women’s health, health literacy, self-help, social prescribing etc.). The goal is to design and implement new measures with and for vulnerable target groups.

As set out in the Government Programme, a key to greater awareness of the topic of nutrition is enhanced integration of food literacy and consumer education in teacher training curricula. The Federal Minister of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.who.int/news/item/01-08-2023-joint-statement-by-unicf-executive-director-catherine-russell-and-who-director-general-dr-tedros-adhanom-ghebreyesus-on-the-occasion-of-world-breastfeeding-week>

Protection has taken a step in this direction by signing the Austrian Health Promotion Fund's (Fonds Gesundes Österreich, FGÖ), Children Eat Healthy ("Kinder essen gesund") charter. In future, the basics of nutrition will be taught in an age-appropriate manner, starting in kindergarten and at school. The Austrian Platform for Health Literacy (Österreichische Plattform für Gesundheitskompetenz, ÖPGK) likewise fosters target group-orientated communication of health-based information building on its pilot project "Good Health Information on exercising and nutrition prepared in a participatory process" (Partizipativ erstellte Gute Gesundheitsinformationen zu Bewegung und Ernährung, PeGGI). Involving young people, health information was compiled under this project focusing on adolescents aged between 14 and 17. This information is to be modelled on quality criteria of Good Health Information Austria (Gute Gesundheitsinformation, GGI Austria). In the forthcoming Nutrition Report, a special focus will be placed on the nutritional behaviour of children and young people.

For a healthy diet to be successful, the healthier choice must be the easier choice – and must also be recognisable as such. This requires comprehensible nutritional labelling. Alongside the mandatory nutritional labelling on the back of packaging, EU law provides for the option of introducing – on a voluntary basis – a labelling system specifying nutritional values on the front of packaging. This labelling is currently being harmonised at EU level under the "Farm to Fork" strategy; a proposal for harmonised mandatory front-of-pack nutrition labelling was announced by the European Commission for the fourth quarter of 2022 and is now planned for the first quarter of 2023. Austria supports this plan, calling for a proposal that involves colour and value coding, calculated per 100 g / 100 ml, but also with reference to the entire food product.

The further development of the mother-child health passport into an electronic parent-child health passport is to lead to a higher uptake of examinations even after the child has completed its first year of life (see Chapter 6 Key Service "Healthcare"). Data obtained in this context is important to also facilitate monitoring incidence of overweight and obesity in the 0 to 5-year-old age group in future.

Due to lack of related regulations, participants in the multi-stakeholder dialogue with UNICEF Austria (UNICEF Austria, 2022) identified an urgent need for action in the areas of advertising and food labelling. Therefore, the voluntary commitment of advertisers not to advertise foods high in energy, fat, sugar and salt to children should be converted into a legal obligation. Furthermore, participants highlighted the necessity of improving low-threshold access to healthy food for low-income families.

In the context of the preparation of this National Action Plan, various stakeholders reported measures to improve the nutritional situation for children and young people. It is worth mentioning that such measures are to be complemented by initiatives to promote physical activity and exercise. In addition to its positive effect on health, sufficient

physical activity is also an important factor in the social development of young people and contributes to preventing or reducing obesity. It has to be noted, however, that a weight-reducing diet may also harbour some health risks. Particularly girls and young women often exhibit unhealthy dieting behaviour that even involves dangerous weight control measures resulting from their negative body image.

Building on the measures outlined above it is sought to improve the nutritional situation of socially disadvantaged children and young people by 2030. With a view to successfully implementing the European Child Guarantee in the field of healthy nutrition, Austria seeks to achieve three targets by 2030. The share of children and adolescents who are overweight and obese is the most important outcome indicator for measuring progress with respect to nutrition. The aim is to reduce the prevalence among vulnerable children and adolescents by 10% every 4 years by 2030 and to significantly reduce the share of 8-year-olds who are overweight or obese by 2030. As COSI data does not differentiate according to household income/family affluence, the target thus covers all children in this age group. The data available in the group of 18-year-olds only relates to young men as it is collected in the context of National Service Draft Board health examinations. A look at the other age groups shows that boys are more frequently affected by overweight or obesity than girls. In future, the availability and quality of data for 0 to 5-year-olds will be improved as it will be collected under the parent-child health passport examinations, the corresponding targets are to be defined in due course (Goal 1).

The goal is to gradually improve the quality of nutrition of socially disadvantaged children and young people by 2030. Measured based on the daily consumption of fruit and vegetables, an 20% increase in consumption has been achieved among the target group compared to 2018<sup>17</sup>. If the measures are implemented as described, a further increase of 20% can be expected every 4 years until 2030 (Goal 2).

The objectives pursued under the National Action Plan on Nutrition are being continuously adapted to changes in circumstances, such as the uncertain effects of the COVID-19 pandemic or new data. It is furthermore planned to expand the goals and include the topics of physical activity, gender equality and migration background. Likewise, a differentiation by socio-economic status is also to be made for all indicators in future (Goal 3).

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<sup>17</sup> In 2018, the share of 11-, 13-, 15- and 17-year-olds from less affluent households who eat fruit and vegetables at least once a day ranged at 20.3% and has since increased to 26.4%.



Objectives: Healthy nutrition

	Objective	Indicator	Source	Baseline	Interim target 1	Interim target 2	Target 2030
1	<b>Reduce overweight and obesity</b>	Share of male 18-year-olds who are overweight or obese	National Service Draft Board health examinations (data measured)	32.7% (2021)	29.4% (2025)	/	26.5% (2030)
		Share of 11-, 13-, 15- and 17-year-olds who are overweight or obese and from less affluent households <sup>a</sup>	HBSC	29.2% (2022)	26.5% (2026)	/	23.5% (2030)
		Share of 8-year-olds who are overweight or obese	COSI (data measured)	24.3% (2019)	22% (2026)	/	20% (2031)
		Share of 0 to 5-year-olds who are overweight or obese	Mother-child health passport (from 2026 parent-child health passport) examinations	unknown	collect, record, define targets (2026)	t. b. d.	t. b. d.
2	<b>Promote healthy eating</b>	Share of 11-, 13-, 15- and 17-year-olds from less affluent households <sup>a</sup> who eat fruit and vegetables at least once a day	HBSC	26.4% (2022)	31.5% (2026)	/	38% (2030)
3	<b>Further development of nutrition-related objectives</b>	Accompanying future measures based on extended monitoring, identification of problem areas and development of new goals and topics to be addressed in the context of the participatory process up to 2030					

<sup>a</sup> Those 20% of respondents who scored lowest on questions about levels of household income/ family affluence



## 8 Key Service “Adequate Housing”

Housing is a basic human need. Having their own, long-term, secure and adequate housing is a key prerequisite for social participation and self-determination for all people – and, especially for children, it is the basis for healthy and positive psychosocial development. Unaffordable tenancies lead to loss of housing and fixed-term tenancies may lead to undesirable changes of residence, which may – especially for children – entail challenging situations (such as change of school, loss of friends, psychological stress etc.). Inflation is currently exacerbating the lack of affordable housing. Responding quickly, the Federal Government launched the WOHNSCHIRM (housing support) programme. Making available funding of 164 million euros, this is the first programme ever introduced to prevent evictions and loss of housing. An additional amount of 675 million euros earmarked for subsidising housing and heating costs was made available as special-purpose grants to the federal provinces.

### Baseline

Statistical data on the housing situation of children and young people in Austria is provided by the Community statistics on income and living conditions (EU-SILC) and the “Registered homelessness” (Registrierte Obdach- und Wohnungslosigkeit) indicator used by Statistics Austria.

With respect to home ownership, a total of 697,000 (43 %) children in Austria lived in houses owned by their family (house ownership) and a further 143,000 (9 %) in apartments owned by their family in 2022. A total of 271,000 (17 %) children lived in cooperative apartments, 152,000 (9 %) in municipal housing (council flats) and a further 323,000 (20 %) in other rented leasehold or sublet accommodation (mainly from the private home rental market). A further 54,000 (3 %) children lived in a rent-free apartment or house. Findings show that children at risk of poverty are much more likely to live in municipal housing or in apartments or houses rented on the private home rental market and much less likely to live in property owned by their family. Of the total of children at risk of poverty, only 16 % lived in owner-occupied houses, 3 % in owner-occupied apartments, 23 % in cooperative apartments and 18 % in municipal housing, while a total of 34 % lived in other leasehold or sublet property (Statistics Austria, 2023a).

Between 2018 and 2020, excessive housing costs were a burden (housing cost overburden rate) that affected on average some 106,000 children each year, which corresponds to 6.8 % of all children in Austria. According to EU-SILC, households in which more than 40 % of disposable household income is spent on housing costs are affected by housing cost overburden (Statistics Austria, 2021). In addition, 254,000 children in Austria lived in an overcrowded (i. e. too small) home in 2022, equalling 16 % of all children. A total of 175,000 children (11 %) lived in apartments that were either damp or affected by mould

and a further 95,000 children (6%) lived in apartments with rooms that were too dark. Single-parent households are disproportionately affected by housing problems, of this group 15% for instance live in damp and mouldy rooms, and 19% are confronted with housing cost overburden (Statistics Austria, 2023a). The “severe housing deprivation” indicator is recorded across the EU and includes those who live in an overcrowded home and who are faced with at least one of the following other housing problems: damp or mould, no bathroom or shower in the home, no water closet in the home, rooms that are too dark. Severe housing deprivation affected 4.8% of all children in Austria in 2020 (Eurostat, 2023).

In a total of 1,927 cases, children were registered as homeless (i.e. without a physical residence) in Austria in 2021 (Statistics Austria, 2023b). This figure covers children who are registered in a centre for homeless people and children holding a “main residence confirmation for homeless people” (Hauptwohnsitzbestätigung für obdachlose Menschen). It does, however, not include children living in basic care facilities (where care is provided by the state for asylum seekers and other foreigners in need of assistance). Only some of the children living in transitional housing provided by homelessness services are included. Experience from street social work shows that it may be assumed that there are several unreported cases of homeless families with children, belonging especially to the group of EU citizens without access to social benefits. Currently, there is no reliable scientific data on the actual number of children that are homeless in Austria, affected by “hidden” homelessness or living in precarious housing situations.

With regard to allocation of responsibilities, housing is a cross-cutting theme in Austria. The distribution of powers is complex, whereby the statutory competences on civil law matters<sup>18</sup>, social housing affairs<sup>19</sup> and social welfare<sup>20</sup> as defined in the Austrian Federal Constitutional Law (Bundesverfassungsgesetz, BV-G) are of particular relevance.

Key stakeholders in the areas of affordable housing, preventing and combating homelessness include, alongside the legislative and executive bodies at federal and province level, numerous non-governmental organisations that are active at both regional and national level. The majority of these are represented by the Federal Working Group on Assistance to the Homeless (Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Wohnungslosenhilfe, BAWO). The activities launched by BAWO include public relations work aimed at combating homelessness, promoting networking among those active in the field and contributing to the further development of professional standards. As the umbrella organisation of the non/limit-profit housing industry, the Austrian Federation of Limit-Profit Housing Associations (Österreichischer Verband gemeinnütziger Bauvereinigungen, GBV) plays a central role in the field of social and non/limit-profit housing.

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<sup>18</sup> Art. 10, Federal Constitutional Law (Bundesverfassungsgesetz, BV-G)

<sup>19</sup> Art. 11, Federal Constitutional Law (Bundesverfassungsgesetz, BV-G)

<sup>20</sup> Art. 12, Federal Constitutional Law (Bundesverfassungsgesetz, BV-G)

### **Existing programmes, strategies and services**

With the Austrian Tenancy Act (Mietrechtsgesetz, MRG) and the Non-Profit Housing Act (Wohnungsgemeinnützigkeitsgesetz, WGG), Austria has a nationwide legal framework aimed at promoting affordability and housing security for tenants. These legal acts play a key role with respect to provision of adequate housing for children and young people. According to a study conducted by the Austrian Institute of Economic Research (Wirtschaftsforschungsinstitut, WIFO) and commissioned by the Austrian Federation of Limit-Profit Housing Associations in March 2021, the non-profit housing sector accounts for around 40% of Austria's rental housing stock with 650,000 residential units. In addition, state-owned rental dwellings (mostly municipal buildings) account for a further 275,000 or just under 20% of the rental housing stock. Due to caps/upper limits introduced by law, rents for these premises are significantly lower than those on the private housing market. Social housing is therefore a key resource for families on low and medium incomes. Boasting around 207,000 council flats, the federal capital of Vienna has a particularly strong municipal housing sector, which provides low and middle-income households with broad-based access to affordable housing, ensuring that around half a million people have a home. Across Austria, around one in five children lives in social housing (cooperative and municipal housing combined), which roughly corresponds to the respective share in the average population. As regards children at risk of poverty, around one in three lives in social housing, thus making up a disproportionately high share.

Alongside provision of adequate housing, financial support services contribute to making adequate housing available to children and young people (including through social assistance, rent allowance, housing allowance, housing support, heating cost subsidies and assistance to persons faced with extraordinary circumstances).

The federal provinces and municipalities provide a wide range of different programmes to secure existing housing (eviction prevention). Likewise, there are also range of different scopes of assistance to help people affected by homelessness that include both premises (night shelters and emergency accommodation, transitional and permanent homes), supervised transitional housing as well as outreach services, street work and counselling centres.

In line with international and European experience, an increasing number of measures pursuing the Housing First approach have been implemented over the last few years. Austria thus seeks to ensure that following loss of housing, those affected will have immediate access to their own, permanent living space that is secured accordingly under tenancy law and also includes needs-based support provided by social workers to be used on a voluntary basis.

The housing-related measures outlined above contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Sustainable Development

Goals 1, 10 and 11. Furthermore, they are essential for guaranteeing children's rights in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, in particular Article 27 "Adequate living conditions".

## **Special target groups, topics and challenges**

### **Affordability and sustainability of housing**

Rising rents, commissions, up-front deposits and contributions to financing housing as well as costs incurred for furnishing often constitute major obstacles to adequate housing for families at risk of poverty and marginalisation. At province level, support to those affected is often guaranteed under social welfare legislation (for instance through assistance granted to persons faced with extraordinary circumstances, funds for up-front deposits or interest-free loans), albeit not always to a sufficient extent.

### **Eviction prevention**

The creation of eviction prevention structures that are sustainable, applicable on a nationwide basis and meet high quality standards plays an important role in preventing homelessness and especially benefits families with children.

The Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection is implementing the WOHNSCHIRM (housing support) programme to prevent evictions and help households to secure their energy and housing needs in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the inflation crisis in line with Section 5b of the COVID-19 Act on Poverty and on the basis of the **Cost of Living and Housing Compensation Act** (Lebenshaltungs- und Wohnkosten-Ausgleichsgesetz, LWA-G). In addition to existing structures aimed at preventing eviction and securing energy needs in the federal provinces, the programme offers the opportunity to apply in the whole of Austria for support services in order to secure or change accommodation and to cover energy cost arrears incurred due to price increases and inflation. With respect to eviction prevention and housing security, underage children live in 45 % of the supported households. Until 2026, a total of 164 million euros will be made available for the WOHNSCHIRM programme, which has already averted eviction in 11,332 cases and enabled 24,890 people to pay their energy bills.

In order to support private households in coping with housing and heating costs, the Federal Government made available a one-off special-purpose grant to the federal provinces totalling 450 million euros that was increased by a further 225 million euros at the end of March 2023. Starting in April 2023, the federal provinces to use this special purpose grant in addition to the local funds already earmarked at province-level for this purpose, to support natural persons in covering increased housing costs.

### **Measures to end homelessness**

For families with children affected by homelessness, residential homes and other facilities with shelter-like structures as well as supervised transitional housing are available in most federal provinces, primarily as a bridging solution. Especially for children, accommodation in temporary forms of housing and the associated change of residence may also cause psychological stress. If not avoidable altogether, their stay in these institutional settings is to be kept as short as possible and their rapid placement in long-term secure housing, coupled with the provision of needs-based care (Housing First approach) is to be treated as a priority. In the breakout session on the topic of “housing”, participants in the UNICEF multi-stakeholder dialogue discussed accommodation and care of families with children in facilities made available by homelessness support services in much detail. In this respect the need to explicitly address the specific needs and problems of children and young people in the related care concepts – both in residential and mobile homelessness support services – was highlighted.

One example of the practical implementation of the Housing First approach is “mobile assisted living” (mobil betreutes Wohnen). Support from social workers and – if necessary – immediate access to affordable, long-term guaranteed housing with their own tenancy agreement is made available to people who are either homeless or at risk of losing their homes.

Another example of the implementation of the Housing First approach is the “arriving at home” (zu Hause ankommen) project, which is funded by the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection under the COVID-19 Poverty Act and aims to find homeless people and people at risk of homelessness suitable accommodation in the non-profit sector, reduce financial entry barriers by paying financial contributions and offer needs-based assistance provided by social workers. By the beginning of April 2023, a total of 565 flats had thus been found and 1,146 individuals supported. Around 40% of those supported so far under this project are children.

### **Particularly vulnerable target groups**

Particularly vulnerable groups require special attention also with regard to provision of housing. These groups include, in particular, women with children who are affected by male violence and are therefore forced to leave their homes; refugee children and young people (both unaccompanied and in their family units); children with disabilities, child and youth welfare clients in transition to adulthood (care leavers) and Rom:nja. In concepts of care, support and accommodation, it is necessary to take special account of their specific housing needs and to evaluate existing and planned accommodation services with regard to options for ensuring the greatest possible deinstitutionalisation and inclusion in a mainstream living environment.

### **Objectives and monitoring**

In its Government Programme, the Federal Government is fundamentally committed to making housing more affordable and rental costs lower for tenants. In the current legislative period 2020–2024, it is thus planned to initiate a housing law reform aimed inter alia at fostering and creating greater social equality in the housing sector (Austrian Tenancy Act / Mietrechtsgesetz, Limited Profit Housing Act / Wohnungsgemeinnützigkeitsgesetz, Austrian Freehold Property Act / Wohnungseigentumsgesetz, General Civil Code / Allgemeines Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch, housing promotion / Wohnbauförderung). In this context, citizens, experts, federal provinces and municipalities, civil society, social partners and other interest groups are to be involved through tools and instruments provided by parliament (including, for instance, hearings and enquiries on the topic of housing, dialogue events etc.). The goal is to define, adopt and implement coordinated measures that address all related key regulatory areas by the end of the legislative period. As regards lettings, the Federal Government introduced the principle according to which the party that commissions the services of a real estate broker will have to pay for the services provided (“ordering party-pays-principle”) on 1 July 2023. Thus, whoever commissions the estate agent first – whether landlord or future tenant – must also pay the estate agent’s fees. This change can relieve tenants of a financial burden equivalent to up to two monthly rents.

Under this National Action Plan, an empirical study is to be conducted to determine the number of children and young people affected by homelessness in the whole of Austria. With a view to performing a prior assessment of the possibilities and potential limitations such a nationwide, empirical survey of the phenomenon may involve, a feasibility study was commissioned by the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection in June 2023. By employing appropriate social policy measures, it is to be ensured that by 2030 not a single child is forced to live homelessly on the streets or with their family in temporary institutional accommodation for longer than is absolutely necessary for appropriate and permanent housing to be secured for them. This goal is to be achieved on the one hand by focusing on eviction prevention, and on the other hand by stepping up the expansion of services directed at families with children affected by homelessness as defined under the Housing First approach.

The number of children and young people living in households struggling with excessive housing cost (housing cost overburden) and those affected by poor housing quality (overcrowding, damp or mould, dark rooms) is to be reduced by 50% by 2030. The percentage of children affected by severe housing deprivation is to be reduced from 4.8% to 2.4% by 2030.

With a view to creating a basis for evidence-based social policy measures in the housing sector, it is planned to commission a study on the topic of precarious housing conditions and hidden homelessness, particularly from the perspective of children. In this respect,

the financial resources available in a household each month to cover living expenses after deduction of housing costs is considered a valid determinant.

Objectives: Adequate housing

	Objective	Indicator	Source	Baseline	Interim target 1	Interim target 2	Target 2030
1	Eliminate homelessness among children and young people	Number of children and young people (0–17 years) affected by homelessness	Data to be collected	Data to be collected	/	/	0 (2030)
2	Reducing housing cost overburden among children and young people	Number of children and young people (0–17 years) affected by housing cost overburden	EU-SILC	111,000 (2022)	70,500 (2025)	/	47,000 (2030)
3	Reducing poor quality of housing or severe housing deprivation among children and young people	Number of children and young people (0–17 years) living in overcrowded housing	EU-SILC	254,000 (2022)	151,500 (2025)	/	101,000 (2030)
		Number of children and young people (0–17 years) living in damp or mould-infested housing	EU-SILC	175,000 (2022)	135,000 (2025)	/	90,000 (2030)
		Number of children and young people (0–17 years) living in a home with dark rooms	EU-SILC	95,000 (2022)	58,500 (2025)	/	39,000 (2030)
		Number of children and young people (0–17 years) affected by severe housing deprivation	EU-SILC	4.8% (2021)	/	/	2.2% (2030)



## 9 Special Topic “Family and Youth”

The thematic area of “Family and Youth” is in line with the Preamble and Articles 2, 5, 8 to 10, 16, 20, 21, 22, 24, 37 and 40 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which define standards for children’s rights in connection with their family, and contributes to the implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1, 3, 4 and 10.



### Baseline, allocation of responsibilities

Their family environment is an important resource for children to draw on both in childhood and adolescence. Strengthening family resources thus has a direct impact on children (UNICEF Austria, 2022). Austrian family policy therefore focuses on striking a balance between related burdens and benefits in the interests of the family, reducing risk of poverty and improving social framework conditions for families, providing financial support and/or allowances for families and young people, and involving young people in social decision-making processes.

In Austria, family policy is thus a cross-cutting theme, both in terms of substance – affecting areas such as social, health, education, women’s and gender equality policy – , and in terms of allocation of responsibilities. Responsibilities in the family sector are divided between the Federal Government and the federal provinces. Targets and objectives in the family sector are defined and implemented at both federal and province level. Substantive priorities are therefore dealt with jointly by the Federal Government, the federal provinces, cities and municipalities, each implementing measures themselves in their respective areas of responsibility or having them implemented by numerous stakeholders (subordinate agencies, associations, non-governmental organisations etc.). Building on regular exchanges and further topic-specific consultations, it is ensured and guaranteed that relevant stakeholders, such as the officers responsible for family affairs at province level, youth officers, statutory bodies, family organisations and the Family Policy Advisory Committee (Familienpolitischer Beirat) are kept involved.

Family policies are future-oriented policies. Hence, it is necessary to create perspectives that guarantee a family and child-friendly environment. With a view to developing the relevant framework conditions for families, sustainable measures directed at driving achievement of this goal are being implemented. Measures aimed at fostering equality between women and men (for instance by enhancing compatibility of gainful employment and care work, innovative project funding, especially for single parents) may also considerably benefit children who are at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

## Existing programmes, strategies and services

Support for families in Austria is provided through a range of cash, in-kind and tax benefits. Many benefits made available by the government are fully or in part financed through the Family Burdens Equalisation Fund (Familienlastenausgleichsfonds, FLAF), an earmarked budget for family benefits. In 2022 alone, 8.1 billion euros in family benefits were paid out from this fund. Around half of the Fund's budget is spent on family allowance (Familienbeihilfe), one-sixth on childcare allowance (Kinderbetreuungsgeld), one-eighth on travel allowances (commuting grant), free travel for pupils and students, free school textbooks and just over one-fifth on transfers to social insurance institutions, including, for instance, contributions to pensions to compensate for child-raising periods<sup>21</sup>. One particular milestone is the automatic annual valorisation of family benefits, which will apply from 1 January 2023.

In total, around 9% of expenditure in the social sector is spent on families and children.

Family- and child-related services and benefits make a significant contribution to combating family and child poverty in Austria (Statistics Austria, 2020). Support and further education services offered by the Ministry for Family Affairs, such as parenting education (Elternbildung) or family counselling (Familienberatung), accompany families through challenging phases of life and are updated, adapted and expanded on an ongoing basis to meet current needs. In addition, the Violence Protection Centres (Gewaltschutzzentren) established throughout Austria and funded by the Federal Government offer counselling, advice and support to children, women and men in cases of domestic violence. Responding to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, funding for family counselling centres was increased several times, by a total of over 75%, seeking to meet in particular the increased demand for psychosocial services through further expansion of the range of counselling services provided. Likewise, in-kind funding for Child Protection Centres (Kinderschutzzentren) was also increased under the violence protection package. A family and child-friendly environment plays a key role in ensuring that families and children are able to successfully reconcile family and working life and that favourable framework conditions are created in families' and children's respective living environments. Aimed at fostering such a conducive environment, municipalities meeting these requirements may be certified as "family-friendly communities", in the context of which they may also obtain the additional certificate of "Child-Friendly City" awarded by UNICEF.

In addition, a range of universal benefits for children and young people is made available at federal level. Granting of these benefits is not related to household income and relates, for instance, to school attendance (please also see Chapter 4 Key Service "Inclusive education and school-based activities"). Further additional benefits are available for

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<sup>21</sup> Based on the evaluation by the Austrian Federal Chancellery.

children with disabilities (see Chapter 10 Special Topic “Inclusion of children and young people with disabilities”) and for children with a migrant background.

The central family policy benefit made available in Austria is family allowance (Familienbeihilfe) to cover some of the living costs for children. Parents are entitled to family allowance regardless of their income and generally until the child or children reach majority. The actual amount of family allowance paid out to families depends on a number of factors, such as the age and number of children, this includes for instance scaling of benefits in accordance with the number of siblings (sibling scale / Geschwisterstaffelung), or additional benefits depending on the number of siblings (Multiple Child Bonus / Mehrkindzuschlag). In 2022, some 4.18 billion euros were spent on around 1.9 million children. In addition, the School Start Allowance (Schulstartgeld) is paid out each August to all children between the ages of 6 and 15. From 2023 onwards, both family allowance and School Start Allowance will also be automatically valorised annually.

Furthermore, the Federal Government makes available vouchers totalling 150 euros each under the “Ready for school!” (Schulstartklar!) project, co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF+), to enable children from households receiving social assistance to purchase suitable school and teaching materials. From 2024 onwards, the voucher will be made available twice per school year, i.e. at the start of school in September and at the beginning of the second term in February, involving additional investment of 15 million euros.

Introduced in 2019, the “Family Bonus Plus”, means a very tangible financial relief for parents in gainful employment. With a view to further reducing the burden on families, the Family Bonus Plus was increased from 1,500 euros to 2,000 euros per year starting on 1 January 2022 (from 500 to 650 euros for children older than 18). Furthermore, the child-related additional tax relief for low-income earners (Kindermehrbetrag) was increased from 250 euros per year to 700 euros and the group of those eligible was extended to include all persons in gainful employment with children. The increase in the Family Bonus and in the child-related additional tax relief meant that the burden on families with children in Austria was reduced by 600 million euros per year, benefiting 1.75 million children in the country.

The childcare allowance (Kinderbetreuungsgeld, KBG) provides financial support to parents with small children (0 to max. 3 years) seeking to – at least partially – compensate for childcare services. Parents may choose between the childcare allowance as a flat-rate childcare allowance or as an income-related childcare allowance. The amount and duration of the allowance paid out depends on the system chosen.

Parents receive a flat-rate childcare allowance regardless of whether they were in gainful employment before the birth of their child or not.

Parents with a low income may receive a supplement to the flat-rate childcare allowance. Furthermore, and in order to avoid certain cases of hardship, payment of the childcare allowance one parent alone is entitled to may also be extended beyond the maximum period.

The childcare allowance makes it easier for parents to reconcile family and work, thus facilitating independent protection against family poverty. The option of flat-rate childcare allowance enables families to choose within a specified framework for how long and in which amounts childcare allowance is paid out. This enables them to adapt both the amount and the period according to their individual requirements and needs. The generous regulations on additional income from gainful employment if parents have opted for the flat-rate child raising allowance is another important element in reducing family poverty.

### **Objectives and strategies**

Objectives and measures to be implemented by the respective ministries are defined in the Government Programme for the current legislative period. The Family & Youth chapter in the current Government Programme is dedicated to “strengthening families, promoting partnership and equality”. Austrian family policy is thus aimed at promoting these goals and enabling families to choose how to organise their life together. The reform of paternity leave and the “Papa Monat” (Daddy Month, granting fathers the right to one month’s leave on the birth of their child) to improve compatibility of family life and work has already been implemented. In this context, the “Family Time Bonus” (Familienzeitbonus) has also been doubled to around 1,450 euros per month in order to increase paternal involvement and bonding.

In the context of the strategic targets defined on the impact of budgetary resources used for families and children (impact-oriented targets/Wirkungsziele), the Federal Chancellery’s Family and Youth Section has set itself the following goals, which are also relevant to this Action Plan:

- Ensuring a balance of burdens and benefits between individuals who do not have children and parents with child maintenance obligations.
- Facilitating the reconciliation of family and work life.
- Supporting families in coping with crises, avoiding conflicts within the family in the event of separation and divorce.
- Protecting children and young people and promoting their development as independent individuals to empower them to lead independent and self-determined lives, and use their productive and creative potential for community and social engagement.

## **Youth policy**

The protection of children and young people and the promotion of their development as independent individuals is the declared aim of independent youth policy in Austria. It is important that the positive effects of youth policy are felt not only by the individual young person, but that framework conditions are created under which young people may fully tap into their potential and thrive in a self-determined manner. Therefore, youth policy is cross-cutting policy that must be taken into account in all political fields of action. In Austria, youth policy matters are coordinated by the Federal Chancellery. Alongside matters relating to extracurricular youth education, the Federal Chancellery's scope of responsibility<sup>22</sup> therefore also includes coordination of youth policy.

## **Austrian Youth Strategy and EU Youth Strategy**

Established in 2012 – and building on the related Council of Ministers' resolutions adopted in 2018, 2020 and 2021 – the Austrian Youth Strategy has constituted a mandate under which all federal ministries are to join forces and cooperate on matters related to youth policy. This Strategy thus further strengthens the Federal Chancellery's coordinating role.

Another guideline applied by the Federal Chancellery in its youth policy work is the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027 that also includes the European Youth Goals (EYGs), developed in a participatory process involving over 50,000 young people across the whole of Europe. In the context of the Austrian Youth Strategy, these Youth Goals are further dealt with jointly by all ministries. Furthermore, Austrian Youth Goals as well as measures that serve to implement them are assigned to the European Youth Goals. Under the Austrian Youth Strategy – that was developed in cooperation with young people – the Federal Government has committed itself to implementing the EYGs across all policy areas. The EYGs relate many SDG concerns to the youth sector. Hence, SDGs constitute an integral element of the Austrian Youth Strategy and of the measures derived, which are to be implemented by the entire Federal Government (Federal Chancellery, 2022; Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 2021).

## **Participation within the framework of youth policy**

Involvement and participation of youth policy stakeholders is a long-established practice at the Federal Chancellery. In this spirit, a youth strategy development group that involves the Austrian National Youth Council (Bundesjugendvertretung) – as the legal representative of all children and young people in Austria – and the federal networks

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<sup>22</sup> General matters and coordination of youth policy is a task that was assigned to the Federal Chancellery by the Federal Ministries Act (Federal Act on the Number, the Powers and Organisation of Federal Ministries, Federal Ministries Act 1986).

for open youth work and youth information was set up at the Federal Chancellery and has been active since 2012.

The National Youth Council and the two federal youth work networks are also important cooperation partners with whom the individual measures of this National Action Plan have been developed and, in some cases, are being directly implemented.

These cooperation partners also provide the Federal Chancellery with direct communication channels not only to organisations involved in extracurricular child and youth work but also to children and young people, through which the latter may also participate in individual measures. The tool of “Reality Checks” also contributed to enshrining participatory elements more deeply into the Austrian Youth Strategy. In the context of such Reality Checks, young people and organisations with expert knowledge on youth matters, provide feedback on all Youth Goals and measures under the Austrian Youth Strategy.

The largely coordinative role played by the Federal Chancellery on youth policy matters means that responsibility for implementation of the objectives therefore partly lies with other institutions and stakeholders, and also includes setting quantitative targets. The Federal Chancellery’s coordination task is rather associated with the establishment of qualitative objectives.

This inter alia includes the implementation of models that integrate the views of children and young people more strongly into the development of policies and measures, whether through the participation of young people themselves or through the utilisation of relevant specialist expert knowledge.

The tool of Reality Checks to be used in all youth policy goals and measures launched by federal ministries (in accordance with Austrian Youth Strategy). Furthermore, all European Youth Goals are to be linked by 2027 to corresponding Austrian Youth Goals and measures taken by the federal ministries, thus facilitating their implementation. In this respect, the focus is to be placed on both quantity and quality of participation and involvement. Through the young people involved, such participatory youth policy will also create a corresponding qualitative benchmarking opportunity.

### **Federal Youth Promotion**

Through “Federal Youth Promotion” (Bundesjugendförderung), the Federal Chancellery provides basic and project-related funding, thus ensuring the work of around 40 federal youth organisations that are active throughout Austria. Taken together, they reach around 1.6 million young people (up to the age of 30) and thus have an important task to fulfil with regard to the inclusion of young people, their scope reaching from leisure activities to political participation.

## **Measures and services aimed at special target groups at federal and province level as well as needs, gaps and challenges**

Alongside universal services and benefits, there are a range of services and benefits directed specifically at vulnerable children as defined by the European Child Guarantee.

### **Child maintenance and maintenance advance**

The Government Programme provides for the modernisation and simplification of child maintenance law. The goals pursued in this respect are the transparent, statutory regulation of the assessment and determination of maintenance payments, accelerated maintenance proceedings and greater consideration of ability to pay and caring responsibilities. Where families are unable to provide financial security themselves (e.g. through labour market participation), this is ensured through social benefits. The granting of advance maintenance payments is a well-established instrument to compensate for cash maintenance payments that have not or only insufficiently been made by parents who are liable to pay maintenance to their underage children. The “maintenance advance” (Unterhaltsvorschuss) is to ensure that children are not negatively affected by lengthy proceedings. The Federal Government places a special focus on combating child poverty in line with the motto “leaving no child behind in Austria”. Especially single parents are exposed to multiple burdens that make their everyday family life more difficult, and can therefore more easily be faced with at-risk-of-poverty situations. Against this background it is essential that existing gaps in the field of maintenance advance be closed. Every year, more than 40,000 children receive such advance payments on their maintenance. In 2020, a total of 135.7 million euros was spent on advance maintenance payments from the Family Burdens Equalisation Fund. In 2021 and 2022 some 130.4 million and 128.5 million euros respectively were paid out. In the provisional federal budget for 2023, the amount allocated to advance maintenance payments is estimated to range at 133 million; the repayment rate currently stands at around 68%. Of some 161,000 underage children who lived in single mother households in 2020, some 118,000 were entitled to maintenance payments, equalling 73% (Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 2021a).

### **Young carers**

One group of children and young people who deserve special attention are the approximately 43,000 young carers in Austria (Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, 2015). Since autumn 2021, dedicated information has been made available to these young people on the “Young Carers Austria” app. This app inter alia provides not only bundled information to support caring children and young people but also an overview of existing support services to parents and interested persons.

The information shared on the app is also available on the dedicated website [www.young-carers-austria.at](http://www.young-carers-austria.at).

## **Family services and benefits provided by the federal provinces**

The support services and benefits made available by the nine federal provinces to families and their children complement those provided by the Federal Government, also taking regional specifics into account.

The benefits and services made available by the federal provinces are either directed at all families or at specific target groups and are not standardised. It is up to each federal province to make available support services according to regional requirements, either as in-kind benefits or as cash benefits. In the context of the preparation of this National Action Plan, numerous notifications of measures were submitted by federal provinces, institutions, associations and non-governmental organisations, which relate to all target groups and services addressed by the European Child Guarantee (see Annex “Overview of Measures”). A flagship project in the provision of support to families is the Early Childhood Intervention Programme (Frühe Hilfen). This summary concept covers interventions in early childhood (from pregnancy to the age of three) taking into account the specific life situations and resources of families (see Chapter 6 Key Service “Healthcare”).

Alongside combating poverty, which falls mainly within their competences, the federal provinces’ scope of responsibility also covers child and youth welfare matters.

## **Child and youth welfare**

By making available social services and assistance in enforcing maintenance claims, child and youth welfare supports parents in fulfilling their parenting duties. Other major tasks include investigating suspected cases of risks to the best interests of the child, and if suspicion has been confirmed, providing parenting support. Since 1 January 2020, the federal provinces have had sole responsibility for child and youth welfare legislation and enforcement. At the same time, the Article 15a agreement on Child and Youth Welfare came into force, in which the federal provinces undertake to maintain and further develop the high level of protection provided by child and youth welfare services. The Federal Government is responsible for preparing statistics and conducting child protection research. In the context of the NAP preparation process, a large number of child and youth welfare measures were submitted by the federal provinces (please see Annex “Overview of Measures”).

## **Multi-stakeholder dialogue**

The multi-stakeholder dialogue also involved a breakout session on the topic of “children’s family environment” in which special consideration was given to the situation of children in precarious family circumstances and in alternative forms of care. When deliberating the topic of “protecting and strengthening the family through the system of family benefits and services”, panellists came to the conclusion that families are in principle aware



of and make use of general benefits/services for families (such as family allowance), but often lack information or are faced with access barriers when it comes to specific family benefits/services. All too often, families are not (fully) aware of specific benefits and services made available by federal provinces and municipalities. It was therefore suggested that a collective database be set up on which family benefits and services, including those offered by federal provinces and municipalities, can be accessed<sup>23</sup>. Whether children actually benefit from support services often depends on whether the child is also considered as a subject. What is more, “stigmatising services” are often not made use of. Although granting family benefits/services to all is cost-intensive, it would counteract stigmatisation among children themselves, for instance by providing free school lunches for all children or entitling all children to childcare. Support services for separated parents were rated positively, particularly those that relate to counselling (parent-child support and guidance during separation and divorce, parent counselling). Unmet needs and challenges were identified with respect to support services for single parents, relating to children with disabilities, in the nationwide provision of affordable childcare and education services both early in the morning and late in the afternoon, at special times or in the event of illness (child or parent) and with respect to counselling, as the services offered vary from province to province and single parents have only limited time resources for obtaining information.

When addressing the range of topics related to “children in precarious family circumstances”, participants focused on Child and Youth Welfare services, which in Austria also cover children in alternative forms of care, in particular in care facilities. Summarising the discussions, one may state that Child and Youth Welfare staff are very committed in all federal provinces, but due to the public image enjoyed by this service (fear that children may potentially be taken away from families), families often tend to consider Child and Youth Welfare a threat rather than a resource (a change of image to “Helping Hands” was suggested). Participants held the view that Child and Youth Welfare quite generally required more time and resources for cooperation on prevention and intersectoral cooperation (also through voluntary work and Early Childhood Interventions etc.) to ensure that families ask for support at an early stage.

Another topic was the particular impact, the COVID-19 pandemic had on children and their families in precarious circumstances, e.g. due to a lack of equipment for distance learning. It was also stressed that single parents are more likely to lose their jobs due to a lack of childcare. Attention was furthermore drawn to the fact that before being

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<sup>23</sup> Information on family benefits and services made available by the Federal Government and the federal provinces is retrievable inter alia on the Transparenzportal (transparency portal) and the Familienportal (family portal) on the website of the Federal Chancellery (Familienportal – Bundeskanzleramt).

entitled to claim social welfare benefits, families must have used up their savings – which, however, weakens families' resilience.

The Government Programme also refers to the situation of single parents who are exposed to multiple burdens that make their everyday family life more difficult, while at the same time making them more prone to at-risk-of-poverty situations. A measure introduced, for instance, by the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection to counter such developments is support provided in the context of COVID-19-related project funding for single parents and their children. Further such support measures are being envisaged by the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection.

## 10 Special Topic “Inclusion of Children and Young People with Disabilities”

This thematic area is in line with Articles 2 and 23 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which standardise the rights of children with disabilities, as well as Article 7 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and contributes to the implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Sustainable Development Goals 1, 3, 4 and 10.

The Federal Government is aware of the particular challenges faced by children and young people with disabilities with regard to access to the key services outlined in the European Child Guarantee. Their concerns and needs are taken into account in a cross-cutting manner in all core areas covered by the Child Guarantee. By dedicating this special chapter to inclusion, the specific situation of children and young people with disabilities is to be highlighted in the NAP on Implementing the European Child Guarantee in Austria.

Disability is a cross-cutting theme. At the federal level, the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection is responsible for coordinating matters related to persons with disabilities, and in its own sphere of activity it launches important initiatives for people with disabilities. The focus of related measures and activities is on participation in employment and equal opportunities for people with disabilities. This goal is to be achieved based on three central legal instruments: the Disabled Persons Employment Act (Behinderteneinstellungsgesetz), the Federal Disability Act (Behindertengesetz) and the Federal Disability Equality Act (Behindertengleichstellungsgesetz). The Federal Ministry is also the focal point for the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD).

According to Article 7, Para. 1 of the UN CRPD, all necessary measures must be taken to ensure the full enjoyment by children with disabilities of all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with other children. Article 7, Para. 3 of the UN CRPD obliges Austria to ensure that children with disabilities have the right to freely express their opinions on all matters affecting them. In order to realise this right, they are to be provided with disability- and age-appropriate assistance.

With a view to implementing the UN CRPD, Austria adopted the first dedicated comprehensive national strategy, the NAP on Disability 2012–2020(2021), in 2012 (Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection, 2012), which sets out longer-term disability policy objectives and measures. They are followed-up on and further developed under the NAP on Disability 2022–2030 that was prepared building on a broad-based stakeholder process, and – following adoption by the Council of Ministers – published on 6 July 2022. The implementation period for the current NAP on



Disability coincides with the implementation of the recommendation on the European Child Guarantee, and hence reference is made to the National Action Plan on Disability 2022–2030.

The central point of contact at federal level for people with disabilities is the Federal Social Welfare Office (“Sozialministeriumservice”), with its nine regional offices (one per federal province). Many areas that are important for people with disabilities, particularly in the context of assistance to persons with disabilities, fall within the federal provinces’ scope of responsibilities.

### **Services and measures at federal and province level, needs and gaps**

In Austria, a range of comprehensive measures, programmes and services are offered at various levels and by various providers to ensure and promote the best possible social participation of children and young people with disabilities. Many of these services are offered by administrative bodies at federal and province level and often implemented at operational level by non-governmental organisations (see annex “Overview of Measures” and NAP on Disability). As fragmentation of responsibilities under the Austrian constitution (federal, provincial, city, municipal and self-governing bodies) is a characteristic feature that also relates to the legal situation and statistics alike, the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection intends in the long term to set up a database on the topic of disability, which is to provide a sound basis for sustainable policies for children, young people and adults with disabilities.

Families with children with a severe disability are entitled to an increase in the general family allowance “due to a severe disability” (please see Chapter 9 Special Topic “Family and Youth”). A certificate issued by the Federal Social Welfare Office (“Sozialministeriumservice”) based on a medical expert report is to be submitted when applying for this increase. Alternatively, and following an amendment to the law, the data from the application procedure for the “Disabled Persons Passport” (Behindertenpass) will be sufficient as proof of severe disability as of 1 March 2023. Thus, persons with disabilities do not have to undergo yet another medical assessment.

In total, the Federal Chancellery supports around 30 family counselling centres specialised in assisting persons with disabilities. As a measure launched under the Austrian Health Targets and based on a joint initiative by the Federal Government, the federal provinces and the social insurance institutions, regional Early Childhood Intervention Networks that are also directed at children with disabilities have been established and developed across Austria since the beginning of 2015 (please see Chapter 6 “Key Service Healthcare”).

Furthermore, children with physical or learning disabilities may benefit from early childhood intervention – a special programme for children in the first years of life and their families that includes medical, psychological and educational aspects. The programme seeks to support and to provide guidance and assistance to families of children with disabilities or developmental delays. Early intervention is offered as an outpatient or mobile service (see Chapter 3 “Key Service Early Childhood Education and Care”).

Launched in summer 2020, “summer school” (Sommerschule) offers targeted remedial teaching. Summer school is considered a social mandate offering support to pupils who need help with catching up in school subjects, to be well-prepared for the school year ahead. An inclusive and barrier-free support concept was developed for children with disabilities and has been offered since 2022 (please see Chapter 4 “Key Service: Inclusive education and school-based activities”).

Services offered under the Federal Social Welfare Office (“Sozialministeriumservice”) include counselling, support and guidance, such as “Youth Coaching” (Jugendcoaching), specifically directed at adolescents, as well as low-threshold, motivational activities focusing on the needs of young people with learning difficulties and those not in education, employment or training (NEETs) to foster labour market participation among young people with disabilities. Alongside youth coaching, related services are also provided under “AusbildungsFit” (fit through training and education) as well as further guidance, supervision and support offered by “Netzwerk Berufliche Assistenz” (NEBA, network vocational assistance), such as assistance provided by youth workers and “Berufsausbildungsassistenz” (vocational training assistance).

Enshrined in the Austrian Youth Strategy, the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection has set itself a range of targeted goals that are being implemented based on measures that are gradually being specified and adapted (please see Chapter 10: Special Topic “Family and Youth”). The goal defined with respect to transition from school to training, for instance, specifies that every young person – regardless of where they live in Austria – whose highest level of education is completed compulsory schooling will be offered the opportunity to undergo further education or training to acquire the necessary skills/qualifications enabling a well-prepared start to working life. Another goal includes promoting young people’s life skills and health literacy to foster psychosocial health (Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 2022a).

Care and support for children and adolescents with disabilities are provided by Child and Youth Welfare Services (Kinder-und Jugendhilfe), operated by the federal provinces, or by foster parents if the adult caregiver may pose a risk to the best interests of the child. Furthermore, the Austrian federal provinces also offer a range of targeted leisure activities to children and young people with disabilities.

In the context of the multi-stakeholder dialogue with UNICEF Austria, the target group of children and young people with disabilities was a cross-cutting topic addressed in all breakout sessions, with discussions also focusing on identifying needs and gaps. In their discussion, participants, for instance, raised the point that families with children with disabilities would need more support and guidance in the context of early childhood education and care provided by the federal provinces. They also highlighted that there were too few specialist centres for parents seeking clarity on their children's potential developmental delays to turn to. What is more, such centres were mainly located in large cities and parents often had to wait a long time both for appointments and in waiting rooms. This was all the more an issue as transition to school is a particularly critical phase for children with disabilities, since mainstream schools usually have fewer opportunities to respond to the needs of children with disabilities than dedicated childcare facilities. Inclusive education within the meaning of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is to include the right of children with disabilities to exercise, thus more support is required in this respect. Since the group of children with disabilities is much more affected by all forms of violence, participants emphasized the need for practitioners who work with these children and young people to update and increase their knowledge on child protection. Such enhanced awareness and sensitivity on their part could contribute to identifying and countering risks to the best interests of the child as early as possible.

Austria is aware that there is major room for improvement with regard to social awareness of children with disabilities and will therefore work towards promoting a paradigm shift from the medical to the social or human rights model of disability, thus fostering the transition from the social welfare-based approach to the human rights approach.

## 11 Monitoring

### Background

Supplementing ongoing work on harmonised EU-wide monitoring at the level of the Social Protection Committee, the implementation of the European Child Guarantee in Austria will be accompanied by a national monitoring process. Following prior consultation with the Federal Chancellery, its Family and Youth Section, and the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection therefore commissioned the Austrian Federal Statistical Office to submit proposals for relevant national data on which to base detailed statistical monitoring of the implementation process. In this respect, the following topics were addressed:

- Identification of the most important national data sources in relation to the six key services and Sub-target Groups identified in the European Child Guarantee
- Developing input for operational monitoring with regard to the six key services and Sub-target Groups identified in the Guarantee, taking account of the process period until 2030 and the annual interim reports to be submitted to the European Commission starting in 2024
- Identifying long-term, explorative ideas for improving Child Guarantee-related monitoring considering the process period up to 2030

National monitoring is essentially based on considerations under the EU-wide set of indicators developed by the Social Protection Committee's indicator subgroup as well as on proposals from the above-mentioned ministries and the multi-stakeholder dialogue with UNICEF Austria, which involved a separate, dedicated breakout session on the topic of monitoring. Other sources used included analyses on the target group of vulnerable children and a special chapter in the regular reports on "key figures on living conditions" (Statistics Austria, 2021) and on "vulnerable children".

### Content and structure of national monitoring

The format chosen were tables structured according to the Key Services and Sub-target Groups identified in European Child Guarantee. For differentiation according to risk of poverty or marginalisation, the "Europe 2020 Strategy" calculation approach is used. It should be noted in this respect that different reference periods were used: "risk of poverty" and "work intensity" refer to the previous year, while "deprivation" refers to the time of the survey or the previous 12 months.

The respective key figures for national monitoring were chosen according to availability, quality and potential restrictions on their use. With a view to enhancing data validity,

3-year averages were formed for indicators with only low case numbers. At the same time, great care was taken to use the most recent data possible and to fully cover the age group of 0 to 17-year-olds. Where this was, however, not possible, alternative indicators that came closest to the respective requirements were used. Whenever available, the reference values for the indicators shown were also included.

A list of long-term – to some extent exploratory – ideas for enhanced implementation monitoring of the European Child Guarantee is presented at the end of this Chapter. These ideas were recommended to Austria and suggested for consideration in the context of the implementation process that covers the years up to 2030.



Target groups

Indicator		in 1,000	in %	Year(s)	Source	
<b>Children and young people affected by poverty and/or social exclusion</b>	Number of children and young people (0–17 years) at risk of poverty or social exclusion, AROPE (“At risk of poverty or social exclusion”, fulfils one of 3 criteria)	353	22 %			
	Number of children and young people at risk of poverty (0–17 years)	316	19 %	2022	EU-SILC	
	Number of children and young people (0–17 years) who are severely materially deprived	36	2 %			
	Number of children and young people (0–17 years) living in households with no or very low work intensity	77	5 %			
	Number of children and young people (0–17 years) living in households with repeated payment problems	69	4 %			
	Number of children and young people (0–17 years) living in manifest poverty (at least 2 AROPE criteria fulfilled)	89	6 %			
	Number of children and young people (0–17 years) living in single-earner households	in total	54	3.4 %	2020–2022	EU-SILC (3-year average)
		thereof AROPE	39	71.0 %		
	Number of children and young people (0–17 years) living in households with long-term unemployment	in total	123	8.0 %		
		thereof AROPE	78	63 %		
	Number of children and young people (0–17 years) living in households that live mainly on social benefits	in total	147	9 %		
thereof AROPE		110	75 %			
At-risk-of-poverty gap (0–17 years), based on national at-risk-of-poverty threshold	/	25.9 %	2022	EU-SILC		
<b>Children and young people with disabilities</b>	Number of children and young people (0–15 years) with disabilities	in total	19	1.4 %	2017	EU-SILC
		thereof AROPE	8	42.3 %		

Indicator		in 1,000	in %	Year(s)	Source	
<b>Children and young people with health problems</b>	Number of children and young people (0–17 years) in very good health	in total	1,319	81.8%	2021	EU-SILC children's module
		AROPE	286	77.2%		
	Number of children and young people (11–17 years) in excellent health	in total	/	35.8%	2022	HBSC
		male	/	42.7%		
		female	/	29.6%		
<b>Children and young people with health problems</b>	Number of children and adolescents (11–17 years) in excellent health living in less affluent families	in total	/	26.1%	2022	HBSC
		male	/	31.0%		
		female	/	21.7%		
	Number of children and young people (0–15 years) with permanent health impairments		49	3.0%	2021	EU-SILC children's module
	Number of children and adolescents (11–17 years) who rarely or never have one of 4 defined psychological complaints (irritability/bad temper, nervousness, difficulty falling asleep, depressive mood)	in total	/	65.7%	2022	HBSC
		male	/	76.0%		
		female	/	56.4%		
	Number of children and adolescents (11–17 years) living in less affluent families who rarely or never have one of 4 defined psychological complaints (irritability/bad temper, nervousness, difficulty falling asleep, depressive mood)	in total	/	65.3%	2022	HBSC
		male	/	74.3%		
		female	/	57.4%		

	Indicator		in 1,000	in %	Year(s)	Source
<b>Children and young people with a migration background</b>	Number of children and young people (0–17 years) by migration background (both parents born abroad, country of origin is the mother's country of birth)	no migration background	1,097	76.0%	2021	Statistics Austria, microcensus labour force survey
		migration background	449	29.0%		
	Number of children and young people (0–17 years) by migration background (both parents born abroad, country of origin is the mother's country of birth)	no migration background	1,228	76%	2020–2022	EU-SILC
		thereof AROPE	179	14.7%		
		EU-27/EFTA	114	7%		
		thereof AROPE	39	34%		
		former Yugoslavia	70	4%		
	Number of children and young people (0–17 years) by migration background (both parents born abroad, country of origin is the mother's country of birth)	Turkey	44	3%	2020–2022	EU-SILC
		thereof AROPE	16	36% <sup>b</sup>		
		other third countries	154	10%		
	thereof AROPE	105	68.0%			
	Number of asylum applications from unaccompanied minors (0–17 years)		5.6	/	2021	Federal Ministry of the Interior, asylum statistics
<b>Children and young people in alternative forms of care</b>	Full education in socio-educational institutions	in total	7.9	0.6%	2022	Child and youth welfare statistics
		male	4.2	0.5%		
		female	3.7	0.4%		
	Full education with foster carers/families	in total	5.0	0.3%	2022	Child and youth welfare statistics
		male	2.6	0.5%		
		female	2.3	0.4%		

<sup>b</sup> High fluctuation range, the 95% fluctuation range is between 1/3 and 2/3 of the estimated value.

Indicator		in 1,000	in %	Year(s)	Source	
<b>Challenging family circumstances</b>	Number of children accommodated in women's shelters	1,5	0.1%	2020	Austrian women's shelters statistics	
	Children and young people (0–17 years) in single-parent households	in total	110	7%	2020–2022	EU-SILC (3-year average)
		thereof AROPE	59	53%		
	Children and young people (0–17 years) with at least one parent with a disability	in total	92	6%		
		thereof AROPE	43	46%		
	Children and young people (0–17 years) by number of children (0–17 years) in the household	1 child	358	22%		
		thereof AROPE	51	14%		
		2 children	659	41%		
thereof AROPE		96	15%			
	3+ children	450	28%			
	thereof AROPE	153	34%			
<b>Homeless, housing problems</b>	Registered homelessness among children and young people (0–17 years)	in total	1.9	0.1%	2021	Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, key figures on living conditions
		male	1.0	0.1%		
		female	1.0	0.1%		

## Core group

	Indicator		in 1,000	in %	Year(s)	Source		
Early childhood education and care	Number of children in early childhood education and care establishments or with registered childminders by age	0–2 years	81.9	32.1%	2022	Statistics on early childhood education and care and after-school care (day-care centre statistics)		
		3–5 years	256.4	95.4%				
	Number of 0 to 2-year-olds in early childhood education and care facilities or with registered childminders by federal province	Burgenland	2.7	39.5%				
		Carinthia	4.6	33.2%				
		Lower Austria	14.7	31.9%				
		Upper Austria	10.6	23.4%				
		Salzburg	4.9	29.4%				
		Styria	8.0	24.0%				
		Tyrol	7.0	31.0%				
		Vorarlberg	4.4	35.2%				
		Vienna	24.6	43.1%				
	Average monthly costs for childcare against payment for 1 child (0–15 years)	in total	141 EUR				2021	EU-SILC
		AROPE	120 EUR					
Public spending on early childhood education and care as a % of gross national income		/	0.6%	2018	Eurostat			
Reduction in the share of children in a cohort who have specific language support needs at the end of their attendance of early childhood educational and formal childcare institutions		/	-30%	2019	Impact monitoring under the Article 15a agreement, Austrian Federal Constitutional Law, on early childhood education and formal childcare until entering primary education			

	Indicator	in 1,000	in %	Year(s)	Source	
<b>Education, school-based activities</b>	15-year-old pupils who achieve at most proficiency level 1 in a basic skill	reading	/	24%	2018	OECD (PISA)
		mathematics	/	21%		
		natural sciences	/	22%		
	Share of pupils with SEN who participate in integrated		/	63,8%	2019/2020	Statistics Austria
	Pupils who achieve at least 553 points in basic skill "reading" upon completion of Secondary Level 1 (proficiency level 4 out of 4 according to UNESCO definition), by parental income	1 <sup>st</sup> income quintile	/	10%	2018	UNESCO, OECD (PISA)
		2 <sup>nd</sup> income quintile	/	19%		
		3 <sup>rd</sup> income quintile	/	26%		
		4 <sup>th</sup> income quintile	/	32%		
		5 <sup>th</sup> income quintile	/	49%		
	18 to 24-year-olds who have not completed Secondary Level II and are not attending a training programme	in total	/	8.1%	2020	Eurostat
male		/	10.0%			
female		/	6.3%			
Pupils at general compulsory schools who use afterschool care		/	33.4%	2021/2022	Definitive staffing plans for general compulsory schools, afterschool care facilities statistics, Act on Investment in Education	
<b>Healthy school meals</b>	Number of federal provinces in which the School Catering Checklist is a mandatory tender criterion for school cafeterias		4 federal provinces	2021	Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Research	
	Number of schools that offer a healthy meal on a daily basis	/	/	/	Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Research	

	Indicator	in 1,000	in %	Year(s)	Source	
Healthcare		in total	/	10%		
	Number of children and adolescents (0–17 years) who have not received treatment within 12 months although they would have needed treatment	Monthly net household income, net equivalised < 60% of median	/	24%	2019	Statistics Austria, health survey
	Share of care regions that do not reach the minimum target value defined for paediatric outpatient care units of 4.2 ÄAVEc per 100,000 inhabitants of resident population	incl. non-SHI accredited physicians of choice whose bill is in part or fully refunded by statutory health insurance (in line with requirements set out in the Austrian Health Care Structure Plan, ÖSG)	/	34.4%	2020	Austrian National Health Institute (Gesundheit Österreich GmbH, GÖG)
		excl. non-SHI accredited physicians of choice	/	40.6%		
	Share of care regions that do not reach the minimum target value defined for paediatric and adolescent psychiatric outpatient care of 0.6 ÄAVEc per 100,000 inhabitants of resident population	incl. non-SHI accredited physicians of choice whose bill is in part or fully refunded by statutory health insurance (in line with requirements set out in the Austrian Health Care Structure Plan, ÖSG)	/	40.6%		
excl. non-SHI accredited physicians of choice		/	40.6%			

<sup>c</sup> ÄAVE = outpatient medical care units with on-duty physicians (ärztliche ambulante Versorgungseinheiten)

	Indicator	in 1,000	in %	Year(s)	Source	
<b>Healthcare</b>	Number of districts with Early Childhood Intervention Networks (Frühe Hilfen)	71 districts		2022	Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection	
	Number of mothers who use midwife counselling services under the mother-child health passport examinations (electronic parent-child health passport from 2026)	/	38.3%	2020	Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection (documentation mother/electronic parent – child health passport)	
<b>Healthy nutrition</b>	Number of 18-year-old males who are overweight or obese	/	32.6%	2021	Statistics Austria, draft board examination	
	Number of children and adolescents (11–17 years) who are overweight or obese	in total	/	21.0%	2022	HBSC
		male	/	25.6%		
		female	/	16.8%		
	Number of children and adolescents (11–17 years) who are overweight or obese from less affluent families <sup>a</sup>	in total	/	29.2%		
		male	/	35.3%		
female		/	23.6%			

<sup>a</sup> Those 20% of respondents with the lowest scores on questions about family income/affluence



	Indicator	in 1,000	in %	Year(s)	Source	
<b>Healthy nutrition</b>	Number of 8-year-old children who are overweight or obese	in total	/	24.3%	2019/20	COSI
		male	/	25.0%		
		female	/	23.6%		
	Number of children (0–5 years) who are overweight or obese	/	/	/		Mother-child health passport (electronic parent-child health passport from 2026) examinations
	Number of children and young people (11–17 years) who consider themselves too fat	in total	/	36.0%	2022	HBSC
		male	/	30.4%		
		female	/	41.0%		
	Number of children and young people (11–17 years) from less affluent families <sup>a</sup> who consider themselves too fat	in total	/	43.4%		
		male	/	38.4%		
		female	/	47.9%		
Number of children and young people (11–17 years) who eat fruit and vegetables at least once a day	in total	/	30.3%			
	from less affluent families <sup>a</sup>	/	26.0%			
Number of children and young people (11–17 years) who generally never have breakfast on school days	in total	/	40.7%			
	from less affluent families <sup>a</sup>	/	46.7%			
<b>Adequate housing</b>	Number of children and young people (0–17 years) affected by “severe housing deprivation” (severe housing deprivation: overcrowding + at least 1 of 3 further criteria)	/	4.4%	2021	EU-SILC	
	Number of children and young people (0–17 years) living in households affected by housing cost overburden	94	6.0%	2019–2021	EU-SILC (3-year average)	

	Indicator	in 1,000	in %	Year(s)	Source	
<b>Adequate housing</b>	Number of children and young people (0–17 years) living in overcrowded households	202	12.5%			
	Number of children and adolescents (0–17 years) living in damp or mould-infested households	180	11.2%	2021	EU-SILC	
	Number of children and young people (0–17 years) living in households with dark rooms	78	4.8%			
	Number of children and young people (0–17 years) living in owner-occupied houses or flats	in total	907	57.3%		
		AROPE	78	22.9%		
	Number of children and young people (0–17 years) living in municipal apartments	in total	128	8.1%	2019–2021	EU-SILC (3-year averages)
		AROPE	74	21.7%		
	Number of children and young people (0–17 years) living in cooperative housing	in total	220	13.9%		
AROPE		57	16.8%			

Additional indicators

	Indicator	in 1,000	in %	Year/s	Source
Demographics, reference values	Number of children and young people (0–17 years)	1,613	/	2021	EU-SILC
	Number of children and young people (0–15 years)	1,298	/		
	Number of children and young people (0–17 years)	1,582	/	2019–2021	EU-SILC (3-year average)
	Number of children and young people (0–15 years)	1,380	/		
				2017	
	Number of children and young people (0–15 years)	1,349	/	EU-SILC	EU-SILC
	Number of children and young people (0–17 years) at the beginning of the year	1,544	/		
	Number of children and young people at the beginning of the year by age group in 3-year steps				
	0–2 years	255	/	2021	Statistics Austria, population statistics
	3–5 years	267	/		
	6–8 years	257	/		

	Indicator		in 1,000	in %	Year/s	Source
Demographics, reference values	Number of children and young people at the beginning of the year by age group in 3-year steps	9– 11 years	254	/	2021	Statistics Austria, population statistics
		12–14 years	254	/		
		15–17 years	258	/		
	Number of children and young people (0–17 years) at the beginning of the year by gender	male	794	51.4 %		
		female	750	48.6 %		
	Number of children and young people (0–17 years) at the beginning of the year by federal province and as a share of the total population	Burgenland	47	15.9 %		
		Carinthia	91	16.1 %		
		Lower Austria	296	17.5 %		
		Upper Austria	271	18.1 %		
		Salzburg	99	17.6 %		
		Styria	201	16.1 %		
		Tyrol	132	17.4 %		
		Vorarlberg	76	19.2 %		
	Number of children and young people (0–17 years) by citizenship	Vienna	330	17.2 %		
		Austria	1.250	81.0 %		
		EU-27 / EFTA	142	9.2 %		
		other third countries	152	9.9 %		
	Gross national income		385.4 billion euros		2018	Statistics Austria, National Accounts

Ideas for further developing monitoring	
Target groups	Using the sector-specific personal identifier (bereichsspezifisches Personenkennzeichen, bPk) or by establishing a household context, the register-based recording of children's income and/or risk of poverty situation could also be conducted for further sample surveys apart from EU-SILC.
	Using variables in the EU-SILC sample context (persons registered as main residence in private households) and administrative data linked via sector-specific personal identifier, it is possible to estimate indicators at a small-scale level.
Early childhood education and care	Questions on the affordability of formal childcare, unmet childcare needs and reasons for not using early childhood education and care services are being developed for the 2024 EU-SILC module "Access to Services".
	Information on parents' employment would be of interest for the day care facility statistics. It should be clarified whether this data is collected and, if so, why it does not appear in the statistics.
Educational programmes and services, school-related activities	Using new computer-assisted methods ("machine learning"), AROPE could in future be linked to school statistics for socio-demographic groups from the sampling framework (age, gender, citizenship, country of birth, employment status of adults in the household).
	Measuring the increase in continuity as regards education in national minorities' languages (share of trainees/students who are consistently taught in at least one of the national minorities' languages throughout the entire 9 years of compulsory schooling).
Healthcare	Data on early childhood intervention (FRÜDOK) contains information on education, country of birth, patterns of household composition and risk of poverty. In future, this data could also be used in the context of monitoring implementation of the European Child Guarantee.
	Cases of inpatient care could be analysed by age or nationality based on hospital statistics.
	Austrian social insurance institutions have data on exemption of prescription fee. Based on this, data correlations between use of services in the outpatient sector and income could be highlighted.
Healthy nutrition	Data on consumption spending collected through the consumer survey can be broken down into detailed expenditure groups. Thus, spending on food could be linked to socio-demographic factors. It would, however, not be possible to clearly determine children's consumption behaviour as data is collected at household level.
	More indicators could be derived from the HBSC survey to assess children's eating behaviour (sweets, fast food, soft drinks) and body image.
Homelessness, housing problems	The number of people affected by homelessness and hidden homelessness could be better and more comprehensively recorded.

<sup>a</sup> Those 20% of respondents with the lowest scores on questions about family wealth.

<sup>b</sup> High fluctuation range, the 95% fluctuation range is between 1/3 and 2/3 of the estimated value.

<sup>c</sup> ÄAVE = outpatient medical care units with on-duty physicians (ärztliche ambulante Versorgungseinheiten)

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