Gender Equality in Austria

Milestones, successes and challenges
Introduction

Dear readers,

In 2018, we celebrate the 100-year anniversary of women’s suffrage in Austria. A great deal of progress has been made and many milestones have been achieved in many areas over the course of this time when it comes to gender equality. However, we still have a long way to go before gender equality will have fully become a reality. There are still challenges in the future, particularly in the areas of violence prevention, the reconciliation of work and family and equal pay for equal work.

By focusing on the main facts in the central areas, this brochure aims to provide an overview of the current situation in terms of gender equality in Austria. The many achievements of the past few years, the current main areas and future challenges are being addressed.

The work of NGOs and collaboration with them are of vital importance in terms of having a positive impact on the field of gender equality. It is also crucial to integrate the gender perspective at an international and European level. The Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2018 is a great opportunity to bring gender equality back as a main priority on the political agenda.

Yours,

Dr. Juliane Bogner-Strauß
Federal Minister for Women, Families and Youth
### MILESTONES FOR GENDER EQUALITY

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<td>Women are admitted as regular students to the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Vienna.</td>
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<td>1918</td>
<td>Universal suffrage including the right both to vote and stand as a candidate for parliamentary elections is introduced in Austria.</td>
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<td>1919</td>
<td>The first eight women become Members of the Austrian Parliament.</td>
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<td>1927</td>
<td>The Austrian Federal Council has a female President, who is the first woman in the world to chair a parliamentary chamber.</td>
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<td>1948</td>
<td>The first female mayor is elected in Austria.</td>
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<td>1966</td>
<td>For the first time in Austrian history, a female Minister is appointed.</td>
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<td>1966</td>
<td>Termination of pregnancy becomes exempt from punishment under certain conditions within the first three months of pregnancy.</td>
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<td>1975</td>
<td>The reform of the Austrian Family Law sets out legal equality between women and men: women are allowed to work without the consent of their husband, to decide where to live and to choose their family name.</td>
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<td>1976</td>
<td>Comprehensive social reforms are adopted: the increase of the parental leave allowance, the introduction of the mother-child-pass, the extension of maternity leave and the one-week carer’s leave.</td>
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<td>1977</td>
<td>Johanna Dohnal becomes the first female State Secretary for women’s affairs.</td>
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<td>The first women’s counselling centre is opened in Vienna.</td>
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<td>1979</td>
<td>Following the reform of the Law Governing Sexual Offences, rape and sexual coercion in marriage or partnership become punishable under law.</td>
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<td>1981</td>
<td>Austria’s first women’s shelter is opened in Vienna.</td>
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<td>1982</td>
<td>The Equal Treatment Act of Women and Men with regard to Remuneration is adopted.</td>
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Milestones for gender equality

1990
- The first Minister for Women’s Affairs is sworn in.
- The law on paternity leave is adopted.

1993
- The Equal Treatment Act in the Federal Service is adopted.

1997
- The Division for Women and Equality is set up in the Federal Chancellery.
- Gender mainstreaming becomes an obligation in the federal administration.

2000
- With the Violence Protection Act, emergency barring, restraining and protection orders are introduced as protection measures for women.
- The first Austrian referendum on women’s issues is held.

2004
- The right to take parental part-time is legally established.

2006
- The Anti-Stalking Law enters into force.
- The Austrian National Council has a female President for the first time.

2009
- A new regulation ensures that the last year of kindergarten is free of charge.

2010
- The implementation of gender mainstreaming in the national budgetary policy is enshrined in the federal constitution (gender budgeting).
- The National Action Plan on Gender Equality in the Labour Market 2010-2013 is published.

2011
- The Ministerial Council adopts a women’s quota for supervisory boards in state-affiliated companies.
- The first emergency accommodation is set up for girls and young women who are victims or at risk of becoming victims of forced marriage.

2013
- Companies are legally obliged to draw up income reports.

2017
- Austria ratifies the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention).
- The Action Plan on Women’s Health is published and is unique in Europe.

2018
- A woman becomes the President of the Austrian Constitutional Court for the first time.
Gender mainstreaming
1

Gender mainstreaming is a strategy which aims to achieve the equal treatment of women and men in all areas of life. Equality between women and men is achieved when the different behaviours and needs of women and men are treated and supported as equal. As a gender equality strategy in the areas of policy making and administration, gender mainstreaming supports all actors involved in policy making on this way.

In 2000, the Austrian Federal Government committed itself to implementing the gender mainstreaming strategy and set up the Inter-Ministerial Working Group for Gender Mainstreaming/Gender Budgeting (IMAG GMB). The IMAG GMB is the supporting and accompanying body for the implementation of gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting at a national level and is chaired by the Minister for Women. It comprises the Ministries, the highest organs (Constitutional Court, Supreme Administrative Court, Ombudsman Board, Austrian Court of Audit, Parliament), the Public Service Union of Austria and the federal provinces. Its main tasks include the exchange of information and best practices, the development of criteria for the implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy and the provision of support and evaluation of current projects, measures and laws on the implementation of gender mainstreaming.
Over various different phases marked by five decisions of the Ministerial Council, the strategy was set out to initially be implemented in pilot projects and eventually in the daily administrative routine. A milestone in this process was the constitutional establishment of gender mainstreaming in the national budgetary policy during the Austrian Federal Budget Reform in 2009:

- **2000**: Establishment of the IMAG GM
- **2002**: Work programme for the implementation of GM
- **2004**: Determination of meta targets, e.g. taking into account the gender perspective in all budgetary measures
- **2008**: GM in administrative routine, budget and jurisprudence
- **2011**: Five central issues to implement GM in the long-term
Gender budgeting and outcome orientation

Gender budgeting is the fiscal tool of the gender mainstreaming strategy. Since 1 January 2009, gender budgeting has been enshrined as an objective in the Federal Constitution, and the federal, provincial and local authorities are obliged to implement effective equality between women and men as part of Austria’s outcome-oriented budget management. This means that public funds are to be used in the fairest way possible to achieve de facto equality between women and men.

Since 1 January 2013 and as a part of Austria’s outcome-oriented budget management, all Federal Ministries and the highest national bodies (Parliament, Constitutional Court etc.) are obliged to define a maximum of five outcome objectives for the annual budget (Annual Federal Budget Statement). One of these objectives must be related to gender equality. Furthermore, specific measures for achieving the objective related to gender equality and appropriate indicators to evaluate the results must be defined. As equality is relevant in all areas of policy making, a coordination process involving all ministries and the highest national bodies was introduced. Moreover, the National Council receives an annual report on the outcome orientation which contains a dedicated chapter on the effective equality between women and men.

The aspect of equality is the only outcome-oriented goal that needs to be considered by all ministries. As a result, a higher degree of transparency regarding the aims of policies and an enhanced outcome orientation on the political and administrative level were achieved. This strong commitment to equality, enshrined in the Austrian Constitution and the Federal Budget Act 2013, has allowed Austria to take a pioneering role on the international stage.

A further part of the outcome orientation is the outcome-oriented impact assessment. With the aim of implementing the outcome
orientation goals as widely as possible, since 1 January 2013, it has been law for all regulatory provisions and plans (e.g. laws, regulations, major projects) to be examined as regards their outcome in terms of gender equality. This means that the prospective outcome of every legislative proposal on the national level and of projects of considerable financial importance needs to be assessed in advance. No later than after five years, every ministry must evaluate if the outcome has turned out as planned.

A particular focus is put on equality-related consequences of: direct payments (e.g. funding of businesses, subsidies); measures taken in the fields of education and employment; and public revenues (taxes, levies and charges). Other factors are also to be considered, such as the distribution of the achievements of unpaid work, the establishment of and changes in the composition of decision-making bodies and different impacts on the physical and mental health of women and men.

Regular observation and evaluation, transfer of information, training, reports and analyses will be required to allow this process, which has been initiated with success, to continue in the future.

Among others, the website of the IMAG GMB www.imag-gmb.at, the annually published gender index, a database of gender equality-related projects and the series of events “Gleichstellung im Gespräch” (Discussions about issues related to gender equality) are available to further raise awareness and support the practical implementation of gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting. The implementation process is also accompanied by the Gender Budgeting Blog blog.imag-gendermainstreaming.at.
Economy and politics
Women in leadership positions in state-affiliated companies

Based on the decision of the Ministerial Council of 15 March 2011, the Austrian government committed to raise the percentage of women on supervisory boards of companies with at least 50% stake held by the federal government to 25% by 31 December 2013. By 31 December 2018, this percentage is expected to rise to 35%.

In order to emphasize the role model function of the government and to raise awareness of the advantages of greater inclusion of women, the government has committed to evaluate the implementation of this quota policy on an annual basis and to present a progress report to the Ministerial Council every year.

In 2017, the average percentage of women on supervisory boards of state-affiliated companies was 46.7%. Furthermore all 54 companies met the required quota of 25% to be reached by the end of 2013. Thirty-seven companies had already fulfilled the quota of 35% women among state-nominated board members which is required by the end of 2018 by 2017, or even exceeded it. In 32 companies, women already made up 50% or more of the board.
Several federal provinces also followed this example and set out similar regulations regarding the appointment of supervisory board members to companies with major public involvement.

**Women in leadership positions in the public sector**

A key question in the context of equality in employment and occupation is the extent to which women are represented in leadership positions. Management responsibility means on the one hand the possibility to make decisions, and on the other hand it correlates with the income level.

In 1993, special incentive measures were taken for women employed in the public sector in order to achieve an approximately equal share of women and men, particularly in the upper and leadership positions.

In the beginning the required percentage of women was 40%; in 2011 it was raised to 50%. This means that female applicants
who have the same qualification as the best male applicants have to be prioritised until the 50% quota is reached, and it applies during the employment process to the public sector and equally to professional advancement therein (see chapter 4 on Equal Treatment).

Between 2006 and 2016, the share of women in the public sector at a national level increased from 38.7% to 41.9%. In 2016, the percentage of women in leading positions (head of division, head of group, head of major subordinated departments) was 29.7%. In 2006, the share was just 15.8%. Nevertheless, women are still underrepresented taking into account the percentage they make up of all employees in leadership positions at a federal level.

The first female rector in one of the currently 22 Austrian universities was appointed in 2007. There are now 8 women in this position.

Sources: Österreichische Universitätenkonferenz (Universities Austria); Public service, data and facts about federal employees – women and men.
Women in leadership positions in the private sector

Women are still considerably underrepresented in decision-making bodies and leadership positions in private businesses. In 2018, the share of women in executive board and management positions of the 200 Austrian companies with the highest turnover was 8.4%; female participation in supervisory boards was 18.5%. The situation in publicly listed companies in Austria is similar. About 5.1% of the executive board members and 18% of supervisory board members are female.

The Act on Equality between Women and Men in Supervisory Boards (GFMA-G) was adopted in June 2017 to raise the share of women in leadership positions. Since 1 January 2018, there must be at least 30% women and 30% men on the supervisory boards of publicly traded companies and companies with more than 1,000 employees. If the required quota of female members of the supervisory board is not reached, the respective appointment becomes invalid due to the infringement of the gender quota. This was an important step to achieve balanced and equal representation of women and men in positions with economic decision-making responsibility.
Political representation

In 2018, Austria has seen a record high of women being represented on the national political level: at the beginning of the current legislation period (9 November 2017), 34.4% of the Members of the National Council were female, which is the highest percentage of women in this body so far. With a share of 36.7% of women on the reference date of 9 November 2017, the Federal Council, the second chamber of the Austrian Parliament, had – for the first time – a higher percentage of women than the National Council. In May 2018, 35.5% of the Members of the National Council and 32.8% of the Members of the Federal Council were women. At a regional level, the percentage of female members of the nine provincial governments varies between 20% and 38.9%, and in the provincial governments it varies between 22.2% and 50%.

Despite progress when it comes to female representation in Austrian politics, women still remain underrepresented. Neither in the two chambers of the Parliament nor in the nine provincial governments is there a balanced relationship between female and male deputies. There is no mandatory quota regulation in force. However, some political parties have set out a voluntary self-commitment which amounts to 40-50%.

Representation of women in selected political bodies in 2018

Sources: Website of the Austrian Parliament; official websites of the federal provinces (May 2018).
Employment and income

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Employment

The employment rate is rising for women in Austria. Within ten years, it increased from 63.5% (2007) to 68.2% (2017) among 15 to 64-year-old women.

Along with the rising employment rate, the part-time employment of women also rose. In 2007, 41.2% of women were employed part-time, compared to 47.7% in 2017. In 2017, around 78% of all part-time employees were female.

The working population in full and part-time work and part-time quotas 2010-2017

Source: Statistik Austria (Austrian Microcensus - Labour Force Survey), 2018; own illustration
In order to support employees who wish to transfer from part-time to full-time, a regulation entered into force from 1 January 2016 which compels employers to inform part-time employees in advance when a job vacancy with a greater number of working hours or a full-time position is advertised.

There are still considerable differences between the share of women and men when it comes to atypical employment. In 2017 this amounted to 53% of women compared to just 17% of men. This means that these women are in part-time work, freelance work, subcontracted work, marginal employment or fixed-term work.

Gender-specific segregation of the labour market also becomes apparent when looking at individual sectors. There are clearly more women working in the service sector, with the highest percentage in trade and in the health and social services, while men predominantly work in the production of goods, in the building industry and in commerce.

The reduction of horizontal segregation is paralleled by overcoming stereotypical gender roles and the diversification of educational paths. In order to diversify the vocational choice and career paths of women, many programmes have been in place for several years with the aim of encouraging girls and women to choose an apprenticeship or further training, particularly in technical professions (see chapter 5 on education). At the same time, more and more initiatives have been started to encourage boys and men to pursue vocational training and careers in the social and care sector.

Gender-specific obstacles which often hinder women from participating in economic, social and political life affect women in rural regions more than women in urban areas. Women in rural regions often face particular challenges: fewer opportunities to participate in the labour market, more career interruptions, even higher income disparities than in urban areas, insufficient
provision of social infrastructure, mainly in elderly and child care, low representation of women in regional political committees and lower mobility compared to urban areas.

The provisions of the active labour market policy are crucial for integrating women into the labour market in a sustainable manner and for raising the income opportunities for women. An important step in this direction is the requirement issued to the Austrian public employment service (AMS) that women must be considered for 50% of expenditure in the active labour market policy.

**Income and wage equality**

On average, women still earn less than men in Austria. Although the gender-specific wage gap is slowly closing, at 20.1% (2016) Austria is still among the EU countries with the largest gender pay gap.

Firstly, measures have been taken to reduce the structural factors for the high gender pay gap. These include the removal of obstacles for women to carry out a full-time job and the improvement of career prospects for women in all professional sectors.

Secondly, the increase in income transparency is an important factor when it comes to reducing the gender pay gap. Since 2011, according to the Austrian Equal Treatment Act, job advertisements must include the minimum wage as stipulated in the collective agreement and, where applicable, the willingness to pay more.

Moreover, also since 2011, companies which have a certain number of staff are obliged to submit an income report every two years. Following gradual implementation, this regulation has affected companies with more than 150 employees since 2014.
A comprehensive tool box is available on www.fairer-lohn.gv.at to support companies with the preparation of the income reports. The website www.gehaltsrechner.gv.at also offers the option to calculate the expected pay for employees who start a new job or who are promoted on the basis of data on current wages and salaries.

At the same time, more measures are needed to eliminate structural disadvantages and wage discrimination of women. Awareness-raising initiatives and educational and consulting measures for entrepreneurs, workers councils, employees and the general public contribute significantly to closing the gender pay gap.
Reconciliation of work and family

Obligations to care for children or dependent adults are a main reason for part-time employment among women, whereas men are usually employed part-time whilst participating in school education or professional training. Unpaid work continues to be undertaken by women rather than men.

It is therefore further necessary to develop high-quality childcare and care facilities across the whole country and facilitate access thereto as well as to strengthen the equal split of housework and care responsibilities in order to offer women in Austria equal opportunities when it comes to full-time or almost full-time employment. The first steps in this direction were taken with the introduction of the free kindergarten year in 2009, the agreement between the national and provincial governments to provide more childcare facilities and all-day schools and also with the two measures, which were introduced in 2017 to improve the sharing of childcare by both partners, the so-called “family time bonus” as well as the “partnership bonus” granted in connection with the childcare allowance.

Parents can take parental leave in turns, and in doing so, they can also share a month together at home. Since 2004, both parents are entitled to claim parental part-time employment under certain conditions or can arrange it with the employer. This provides among other things protection against dismissal and a right to return to the job with the original working hours.
**Pensions**

The Austrian statutory pension system is a pay-as-you-go system. The entitlement for the individual retirement benefits depends on the contributions levied from gainful employment and certain periods of time (child care, care of relatives, unemployment). These periods of time are listed in the individual pension account and can be viewed by the insured person. The retirement age is currently 60 years for women and 65 years for men. From 2024, the retirement age for women will be gradually brought in line with the retirement age for men.

The average old-age pension level of women is lower than that of men, which is mainly due to the lower income of women and the fact that women are more often employed part-time and have more career interruptions. In December 2017, the average monthly old-age pension received by women amounted to 1,000 euros, which is 61% of the average pension of men (1,635 euros).

In contrast, women more frequently receive widows’ pensions and equalisation supplements than men and receive higher amounts when they do. This can be explained by their higher life expectancy and lower average pensions.

Due to having lower pensions, elderly women, particularly those who live on their own, are more often at risk of poverty. In 2017, they had an at-risk-of-poverty rate of 22% (EU-SILC 2017), which is almost twice that of male pensioners living alone.
In 2017, the second updated edition of the brochure “Women and pensions. How decisions in life can influence the financial protection in old age” was published. A folder provides brief information about the most important elements of the pension system and shows options for how to improve the amount of retirement benefits. Both publications are available online and in print at the Division for Women and Equality of the Federal Chancellery.

Source: Hauptverband der österreichischen Sozialversicherungsträger (Main Association of Austrian Social Security Agencies); Statistical data of the social security. Insured persons, retirement and other pensions (Annual results 2017).
Integration into the labour market

Removing the disadvantages women are facing is one of the key themes of the women’s and gender equality policy. Women who have immigrated to Austria are even more affected by structural disadvantages due to their migrant background. A focus of the women’s policy is therefore on improving the situation for female migrants.

In 2016, about 14% of all women in Austria were foreign nationals. A total of 18.4% of the women living in Austria were born abroad, and 21.7% had a migrant background which means that they themselves or at least one of their parents was born abroad.

A major challenge for female migrants is finding gainful employment. Women who have immigrated to Austria from a non-EU country are generally less often employed, have a lower net income and are more often unemployed. A major focus of the Austrian public employment service (AMS) is therefore to give these women better opportunities to participate in the labour market.

One of the barriers for accessing the labour market has been the recognition of foreign qualifications. The Act on Recognition and Evaluation of Foreign Educational and Vocational Qualifications was introduced to facilitate integration into the labour market based on qualifications. This includes the simplification of the evaluation and recognition process for foreign qualifications, the creation of an independent recognition portal and the establishment of direct contact points for people who have acquired qualifications abroad.

For female migrants, in particular for those who have fled from war and crisis regions and have come to Austria in recent years, access to and integration into the labour market remain a major challenge. The main focus is therefore on reaching out to female migrants to facilitate their access to the labour market and employment and the identification of factors that foster and hinder this process.
Equal treatment
Austria has a long tradition as regards legislation concerning gender equality. The Equal Treatment Act of Women and Men with regard to Remuneration (private sector) was adopted in 1979. The Equal Treatment Commission was already set up in this original enactment of the law.

Since then, the law has been considerably expanded and all phases starting from the conclusion of a contract of employment to career advancement and ending with the termination of a contract can be investigated for possible discrimination. The offenses of harassment and of sexual harassment were also included.

In 1993, the Equal Treatment Act in the Federal Service was adopted applying to the federal administration, this law mainly differing from the Equal Treatment Act concerning the private sector by including the chapter “Special support measures for women”. For the first time, a “women’s quota” was regulated by law. Among applicants with the same level of qualification, women are to be favoured when being contracted or promoted in the public sector until a percentage of 50% of women is reached in the respective function group. As a means of supporting measures to promote women, each federal ministry is legally obligated to pass promotion schemes for women.

In 2004, the types of discrimination were expanded in both Equal Treatment Acts, the result of which is that, besides discrimination on the grounds of gender, it is now no longer lawful to discriminate based on ethnicity, age, religion or ideology and sexual orientation (with a couple of legal exceptions) in employment and occupation. Outside of the working world, discrimination based on gender or ethnicity is prohibited by law when it comes to access to and the supply of goods and services which are available to the public, including living space.
In order to provide people affected by discrimination in their professional life with the possibility of settling such conflicts out of court, equal treatment commissions were set up for the private and the public sector. The independent members of these expert bodies come from the federal ministries and associations of social partners (employee and employer representatives). The proceedings are free of charge for the persons concerned and no lawyer is required. They are therefore easily accessible compared to a court case.

Every two years, reports on gender equality (one each for the private and the public sector) are submitted to the National Council in order to give information about the situation in Austria regarding gender equality, so that further legal steps can be taken, if necessary.

In order to ensure exchange with NGOs working in the area of non-discrimination, it is now enshrined in law that the member of the government who is responsible for equal treatment/gender equality invites the relevant organisations to a dialogue on the subject at least once a year.

Moreover, the Ombud for Equal Treatment is legally established to ensure that the right to equal treatment and gender equality is enforced and discrimination is prevented. The ombud can e.g. carry out independent investigations in the field of discrimination and publish reports and recommendations on their findings and provides counselling services and information about enforcing the right on equal treatment.
Education
Over the last few decades, the educational level of women has significantly increased. Slightly more women than men had e.g. an academic degree in 2015.

Level of education of the population in 2015 (25 to 64 years) according to the highest formal educational qualification

Source: STATISTIK AUSTRIA, National Education Register 2015, own calculations. Secondary education includes secondary vocational and technical schools (BMS), colleges for higher vocational education (BHS), academic secondary schools (AHS) and postsecondary VET courses (Kolleg).
When it comes to choosing the subject of study or vocational training, there is still a large discrepancy between women and men. In the subjects veterinary medicine (80%), humanities (74%) and fine and applied arts (64%), the percentage of women is particularly high. In technical and scientific subjects, however, there are hardly any female students. When it comes to apprenticeships, around half of all female apprentices in Austria opt to train as a hairdresser, office administrator or retail saleswoman.

Existing measures therefore specifically aim at overcoming barriers to accessing scientific and technical training courses and professions. With the set-up of the platform “meine Technik” in 2015, there has been a central online medium for the first time which provides information about the existing workshops, excursions, competitions, counselling services, mentoring programmes and job information days currently on offer as well as teaching materials, compendia and training offers in a very attractive and clear way. The website www.meine-technik.at has hence become the central contact point for projects in the fields of science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM).

In order to encourage girls to conquer new professional fields in the STEM subjects, schoolgirls from the age of 6 are invited to the “Girls’ Day” which is organized in the public sector each year. Since 2006, this action day has taken place within the federal ministries and the subordinated departments on the basis of a Ministerial Council Decision and allows the girls to gain an active insight and real experience within the public sector. The “Girls’ Day MINI” has taken place since 2015 and addresses girls in the kindergarten age group of 4 years upwards. Further information about the “Girls’ Day” and the “Girls’ Day MINI” is available at www.girlsday-austria.at.

The equivalent “Boys’ Day” focuses on enabling boys to get to know professions in social institutions. Further information is available at www.boysday.at.
Counselling centres for women and girls
Counselling centres for women and girls

The first counselling centre for women in Austria was opened in 1981 in the district of Ottakring, Vienna. The counselling, therapy and educational work helps women to cope with problems which are interlinked with their disadvantages in society and with their experiences of violence.

The Minister for Women and other regional and local authorities, among others, help to provide funding for the around 130 counselling centres for women and girls all over Austria, the five counselling centres for women who are victims of sexual violence and both an online counselling service and women’s helpline against male violence which are available nationwide, as well as women’s and emergency shelters.

About 90,000 women and girls in Austria turn to these easy-access, confidential and free counselling services every year, which are open for all women and girls regardless of their age, background, their employment or asylum status and the problems they are confronted with. The main topics raised in the counselling sessions are violence, relationships, health and work.
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### Topics at single sessions in 2016 at the counselling centres for women and girls

Source: Federal Chancellery, Division for Women and Equality.
Protection against violence
In addition to implementing diverse measures in the field of gender equality, Austria has taken several measures, in particular in the area of domestic violence, to remove taboos regarding violence against women, to implement effective law enforcement and to provide a comprehensive support system for victims. The ratification of the Istanbul Convention (“Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence”) in 2011 has had a further significant impact and has led to legislative measures against sexual violence, forced marriage and cyber violence.

Despite these advances, there are still many challenges that need to be addressed. Women are most likely to be at risk of becoming a victim of sexual, physical or psychological violence from people within their own social circle, in many cases the (ex-) partner. The removal of taboos surrounding sexual violence is particularly important in this respect. Data from the police and judicial data show that generally only a very small number of acts of violence is reported to the police and even less of them lead to a conviction of the offender.
Further major challenges are to maintain and further expand support services and to improve access thereto for particularly endangered women, such as those having physical or mental impairments or those with a migrant or asylum-seeking background. Another important step ahead lies in guaranteeing financial independence for the affected women, which is a basic prerequisite for them to be able to get out of a violent relationship.

Women who have experienced physical and/or sexual violence (since the age of 15)

- **by partner or other person**: 33%
- **by partner**: 22%

**67%** did not experience violence  
**78%** experienced violence

Source: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Survey on gender-related violence against women, country evaluation of Austria, (n=1,500 women), 2014.
Domestic violence

On 1 May 1997, the Act on Protection against Violence with the general principle “whoever hits must leave” entered into force. Since then, several amendments have further improved the legal protection of victims of domestic violence, who are mainly women.

The Act on Protection against Violence is based on three pillars: The police is entitled to issue a restraining order against the aggressor. The victim has the option to petition the civil court for an extension of the restraining order and for an additional contact ban. Additionally, specific violence protection centres were created, which are informed by the police when a restraining order is issued and which actively offer immediate support to the victim.

The Act on Protection against Violence has significantly contributed to removing taboos surrounding domestic violence. Vital for its implementation was the simultaneous creation of comprehensive support services.

One of the remaining major challenges is providing sustainable support to the victims, especially when a separation, e.g. due to financial reasons, is not possible or desired. In these cases, the victim protection-oriented work with the offender is particularly relevant. While protecting the interests of the victim, the intention is for the offender to learn how to live without violence in the long term. The nationwide implementation of victim protection-oriented work with the offender has only just started in Austria and requires further efforts. Additional progress is also necessary when it comes to supporting particularly vulnerable groups, like women with physical or mental impairments.
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### Sexual violence

With effect from 1 January 2016, the new provision “Violation of Sexual Self-determination”, Article 205a of the Criminal Code of Austria, was introduced. It criminalises sexual intercourse without consent and is an addition to the existing criminal offences of rape and coercion. It is sufficient when the lack of consent was apparent to the perpetrator, e.g. when the victim freezes. It is also considered a criminal offence when the victim was made to comply under coercive circumstances or following an act of intimidation.

The legal provisions on sexual harassment have been considerably extended in the last years. It goes beyond touching of sexual organs and the penalty range is increased when sexual harassment is committed in a group or through taking advantage when in a position of authority.

Considering the high prevalence of sexual violence and at the same time the very low conviction rate, major challenges in this field are the need to increase specialist support services for victims and improve the safeguarding of evidence which is suitable for use in court.
Women who have experienced a serious form of sexual violence (since the age of 15)

by partner or other person
- Experienced: 9%
- Did not experience: 91%

by partner
- Experienced: 6%
- Did not experience: 94%

Women who have experienced sexual harassment (since the age of 15)

- Experienced: 35%
- Did not experience: 65%

Source: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Survey on gender-related violence against women, country evaluation of Austria, (n=1,500 women), 2014.
Violence related to traditional cultural practices

Violence related to traditional cultural practices (harmful practices) comprises gender-related violence against women based on cultural and religious moral concepts, in particular forced marriage and female genital mutilation. Both forms of violence are prosecuted under Austrian law. The main challenges in this field are preventive work, awareness-raising among the communities and support of the victims.

In 2013, an emergency accommodation was set up for girls and young women who are exposed to forced marriage. This emergency accommodation provides young women in crisis situations from all over Austria with a specialised, protected accommodation and intense care, counselling services and support.

Victim protection

Over the last 15 years, considerable progress has been made in Austria when it comes to victim protection. Further specialist counselling services for victims have been established and the procedural rights of victims have been continuously extended. Particularly important is the free psycho-social and legal court assistance which victims of violence can receive under certain conditions.

The challenges ahead comprise above all the expansion and further development of the existing support services starting from the counselling services through to the court assistance.
Women and men in Austria face different health risks, show different symptoms in certain illnesses and do not always react to identical medical treatments in the same way. Women also subjectively perceive their health condition to be slightly worse than men. In 2014, 81% of men rated their health condition as “good”, but only 77% did so among the women. (Statistik Austria, Health survey 2014)

Self-determination of women in all health-related issues and gender-specific aspects of health promotion, prevention and care are important in a society. In order to reach equal opportunities in the health system, gender aspects need to be considered in health research and planning as well as in the areas of health promotion, healthcare provision and rehabilitation.

Against this backdrop, the Action Plan on Women’s Health was presented in 2017. Containing 17 outcome-oriented objectives and 40 measures, this action plan constitutes an important step toward improving the health of women in Austria and promoting equal opportunities. The measures are structured according to the different stages in the life of women – youth, working age, old age – and to topics that span all ages. Following the “Health in All Policies” approach, the health aspects are considered in all policy-making areas.

The action plan is implemented together with the relevant interest groups and the relevant stakeholders of the health system, women’s politics and other policy areas.