

CHAPTER 9

Families in Austria

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1. INTRODUCTION

Austria is located in southern, central Europe. Geographically, its territory encompasses both the Eastern Alps and the Danube region and has a land surface of 83,858.3 sq km (32,369 sq miles). Located within a temperate climatic zone with influence of the moderate Atlantic climate in the west and the influence of the continental climate in the east, Austria includes a wide variety of landscapes and flora. About 46% of its surface area is wooded. Austria's landscapes range from the mountain peaks of the Alps to hilly landscapes and plains. The foothills of the Alps and the Carpathians as well as the Vienna Basin in the east are the principal areas of settlement and economic activity.

According to census data for 2001, Austria has 8.1 million inhabitants, of whom approximately 98% speak German. Austria has common borders with eight other countries: Germany and the Czech Republic in the north, Slovakia and Hungary in the east, Slovenia and Italy in the south, and Switzerland and Liechtenstein in the west. At the end of World

War I, the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy disintegrated mainly as a result of forces of nationalist self-assertion and as a consequence of the Versailles treaties. In 1918 Austria finally was proclaimed a republic.

Austria's population is quite heterogeneous. Czechs, Slovaks, and Hungarians reside in eastern Austria and in the capital of Vienna. There is also a small Croatian and Slovenian minority around the southern regions, but at present immigrants from the former Yugoslavia and Turkey exceed these original minorities. About 10% of the Austrian population are immigrants.

There are six ethnic groups officially recognized in Austria. In terms of religious allegiances, 78% of Austrians are Roman Catholic, and 5% are Protestant. Some 4.5% of the population belong to another faith, and 9% do not belong to any religious group.

While the alpine regions in the west are agriculturally oriented, the eastern part of Austria was urbanized and industrialized early on. In 1995 Austria joined the European Union.

Demographic Description

Austria is considered a typical social welfare state with low rates of infant mortality (0.5%), an extensive system of social security, high quality of life, and high life expectancy. In terms of demography, Austrian family patterns are quite characteristic of advanced and modern industrialized societies. The number of marriages is declining; at the same time, the number of divorces is rising. The fertility rate is rather low. In Austria about 2 million people are married or cohabiting. More than one-half of them (about 55%) have children. The number of single parents is steadily increasing and is now up to about 400,000.

While the importance of marriage has definitely decreased, one might say that the importance of family as an institution has increased. Family and children mean a lot to Austrian people and more than 80% see it as one of the most important aspects of their life. This might explain why the number of families, including cohabiting couples, with children, as well as single parents, has risen in the last decades. While in 1971 there were about 2 million families, in 2001 there were 2.3 million families. Furthermore, the number of families with children has also risen from 1.3 million to 1.4 million.

However, the fertility rate, in at 1.31 in 2001, is quite low. In this context, it is interesting that although couples, and especially women, usually would like to have two children or more, in most cases they have only one. There is no real explanation for this gap between wishes and practice. It is probably due to a combination of factors such as the economic situation, individualistic values, and experiences with the first child (first-child "shock," according to Nave-Herz, 2002). Nevertheless, social scientists found that couples' wish for children has decreased, and it has become normal to have one or even no child. If this development continues,

the fertility rate will further decrease, and the decline will not be balanced by immigrant families living in Austria, who have more children than Austrian families.

At this point we should say that reported data and demographic developments in this chapter refer mainly to data from the 1960s and the 1970s. More recent figures show more dramatic changes.

2. PAIRING UP

It is remarkable that a relatively small amount of data exists about the process of pairing up or finding a partner in Austria. Youth research in Austria suggests that socializing mainly takes place in school and other educational institutions rather than in cafes, discos, or in the street.

In Austria during the 1950s and 1960s, it was quite common for young people to be members of youth groups, such as voluntary associations, and political or religious institutions. However, since political and religious institutions have been losing their credibility during the last decades, they are now less important in the process of pairing up. Young people may also socialize with peers in the context of sport activities, but few engage in a sports club.

Modern facilities such as the Internet are beginning to play an important role in the process of pairing up. However, it seems that singles platforms are considered a game rather than a serious means of socializing and pairing up among young people. Conversely, the Internet seems increasingly to be of use for people between 30 and 40 years of age to approach other people. However, there exist no representative studies dealing with this phenomenon.

In young people's minds, values such as family and friends play an essential role and are of great importance for their well-being. According to the *Vienna Youth Health*

Report in Austria (2002) aside from the family, whose importance remains stable, friends represent the most important social reference group for young people. (See also Großegger, 2001.)

More than 50% of young people in Austria between the ages of 15 and 24, especially girls, wish for a permanent partnership and plan for children in their 20s or 30s. Boys and some girls in their teens prefer to enjoy youth before seriously pairing up and beginning a family. Generally speaking, young people connect partnership to faithfulness, trust, and having fun, but cohabiting seems unimportant to them at this time.

Studies on adolescent sexuality indicate that most adolescents first have sexual intercourse between ages 16 and 19. This has not changed noticeably during the last 25 years. At the age of 16, 50% of adolescents have already had sexual intercourse, and about 25% will first have intercourse after the age of 18. In Austria the number of teenage mothers is negligible and decreasing.

While in the late 1960s and early 1970s people married at the age of about 20, at present they marry closer to 30. Consequently, the mean age at the time of marriage has risen considerably. This is due to the fact that people prefer to date someone without sharing a household or living together in nonmarital cohabitation or marrying right after having met. The time delay of marriage creates a new phase in life, the so-called postadolescence or early adulthood that is very characteristic for young people in Austria between ages 20 and 30. They might have a partner, but they are not likely to live together. Some cohabit, but this does not mean that they are getting married. They find themselves in an ambivalent situation, trying to be independent while in constant touch with their parents.

In Austria young women leave their parental home for the first time on average at the age of 20, and young men leave about

2 years later at the age of 22.5 (Pfeiffer & Nowak, 2001). Figures from the *Family and Fertility Survey* (Doblhammer, Lutz, & Pfeiffer, 1996) show that 23% of men born between 1966 and 1970 had not moved out of their parents' home by the age of 30. Some young people return to their parental home later on as a consequence of separation or financial difficulties.

3. FERTILITY AND SOCIALIZATION

In Austria nearly all children (98.3%) are born in a hospital. Austria has a very low fertility rate. In 2001 it was at 1.31, corresponding to a reproduction rate of 0.63. This decline in population provokes severe sociopolitical problems, which at present are intensely discussed by politicians, social scientists, and other experts.

Although the fertility rate is higher among immigrants, who represent about 10% of the Austrian population, this will not make up for the population loss within the scope of the next generation. This development has far-reaching consequences for the pension schemes in Austria, which are based on the transfer of insurance contributions from the working population to retirees. On the other hand, it can be argued that a smaller population of young people would save expenses in relation to childcare or the educational system.

Low fertility remains a fundamental characteristic of the country's family system, and family policy consults fertility rates for family-related decisions. Low fertility results from multiple political, social, and economic factors that have an important impact on people's preferences: the feasibility to combine work and family, financial circumstances, need for personal freedom, housing conditions, and the perception of society as child-friendly. In Austria a large number of care institutions are available, and on

average 80% of children between 3 and 6 years old attend kindergarten.

Socialization mainly takes place in the family and in school. School is obligatory for 9 years. After 4 years of primary school, secondary schools, vocational schools, or grammar schools are available. Most children attend school for a total of 12 years and in so doing obtain a general qualification for college or university entrance.

In Austria education is marked by tolerance and cooperation between children and their parents. Parents feel that it is important to make their children responsible, independent, and tolerant persons having good manners. However, only one-quarter believe that children's obedience is crucial to child-rearing.

4. GENDER ROLES

Gender roles and gender differences in society constitute an important research topic. Let us summarize some crucial points. At present 15% of children below 15 live in single-parent households. In 93% of the cases, children live with their mother.

Although women tend to search for a man with an equal or higher level of education, they increasingly marry men with lower levels of education. This is due to the increasing number of women in the tertiary educational system, which exceeds that of men (Schwarz & Spielauer, 2002).

The distribution of household chores is considered one of the most useful indicators of the disparities between men and women. In the 1970s the Austrian government argued that household chores should be distributed equally between partners. However, household chores are still mainly done by women, even though changes have taken place. While in 1983 about 75% of men reported that they would not do any chores, in 1995 it was down to 60%. This change can partly be explained by the increasing

number of men living in single households during the last decades, and also, of course, by the increasing number of men participating in the doing of chores.

The *Family and Fertility Survey* (Dobhammer et al., 1996) shows age differences in this matter. Young men are more willing to do household chores than older men. Furthermore, it is indicated that the portion of work done by men may be overestimated. For example, 50% to 75% of men report that their spouse does the cooking, while 70% to 90% of women say they do the cooking. Therefore, percentages based on questionnaires rather than on daily protocols are quite imprecise, though they may indicate trends concerning the distribution of housework. The general findings are quite stable: Household chores are mainly done by women, and young men do significantly more chores than older men. Shopping, for example, seems to be done equally by men and women between 30 and 39 years old.

It is remarkable that the distribution of household chores significantly changes after birth of the first child. Men do fewer household chores than before, neglecting activities such as cooking, shopping, cleaning, washing, and ironing. Marital satisfaction of both men and women decreases when children are born (Rollet & Werneck, 2001, p. 132). Although these data are from 1992, they have not lost their timeliness and the results still hold today. Considering job and housework together, women work on average 1 hour more than men regardless of how many hours they work in paid labor.

Childcare requires a lot of time, and usually women care for their children. Most men are only periodically involved and play, dress, or swaddle their children on an irregular basis. Because of this irregularity, men spend less absolute time in childcare than women do. And, as we have said, young men care more for their children than older men.

Parental leave is mainly claimed by mothers. Although 19% of men can imagine taking leave at least for a short time, only about 2% actually do. As a new qualitative study indicates (Gräfinger, 2001), there are several social factors having a significant impact on men's attitudes toward parental leave. Most men argue that the main reason for not taking parental leave is their substantial income and the risk of being considered a loser. Most men feel that their employer would not embrace their parental leave. However, men who did take parental leave report that they surprisingly had far fewer difficulties than they had expected. In addition, it is interesting that men's parents and parents-in-law do not want their son or son-in-law to stay at home and care for his children. Sisters-in-law are more agreeable to the idea, and when men take parental leave, they are surprised by how many household chores have to be done.

Such results are beginning to lead to public debate, and while most studies researching the combination of family and work focus on women's perspectives, recent studies are taking into consideration men and their points of view.

Although Austrian law allows parents a maximum of 3 years of parental leave on condition that men take at least 6 months, only very few men take this opportunity. As a result hardly any family utilizes the full 3 years of leave.

As part of the discussion of the division of household chores, family research also deals with the question of how partners negotiate the division of work. Mikula and Freudenthaler (2002) researched the distribution of household chores from a psychological point of view. His secondary analysis of data of the *Family and Fertility Survey* (Doblhammer et al., 1996) shows that about one-third of women perceive the division of household chores as unjust. This feeling strongly relates to the time spent on chores by women themselves. Furthermore, women desire their

partner to come off well in comparison to other men—and the better he performs, the more women are comfortable with the actual division.

Marital status and income also contribute to the evaluation of equity. In comparison to unmarried women, married women feel the division of chores to be more unjust, and the lower their income, the more dissatisfied they are. Therefore, the perception of equity or inequity strongly depends on women's social relations and their social network rather than on real differences and inequalities. However, in most partnerships the distribution of household chores does not lead to any fundamental conflicts.

One of the most essential functions of the modern family is the care of its members, especially of children and the elderly. In 1999 it was estimated that this work would be valued at € 58 billion if counted as wages, including hours of overtime. About 80% of this work is done by women. In contrast to other European countries, it is remarkable that women in Austria and Germany find it particularly difficult to combine work and family, although modern childcare facilities are available and family policies are among the most advanced in Europe (European Commission, 1996).

This result might be due to the prevailing idea that children have to be cared for by their mother—and only by their mother. Because of this social norm, most women feel constrained to care for their children and stay at home—at least as long as their children are below 3 years of age. Value studies researching people's opinions about how women's professional life affects the well-being of their children found that the majority of men and women living in a partnership think that the relationship between the mother and her children is not affected unfavorably by occupation. In 1996, 75% of women and 66% of men agreed with this. However, by contrast, 71% of men and 65% of women are of

the opinion that it is better that men are the breadwinners and women care for the children (Bacher & Wilk, 1996, pp. 175f).

Although gender roles have begun to change fundamentally during the last decades—in some families both parents work part-time or the father even cares for the children and the mother works—it is still widely expected that women care for their children while men go to work. This is why most women feel guilty when trying to combine work and family if their child is in a childcare institution.

5. MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS

Traditional roles lose their importance and partners continually have to negotiate and arrange their relationship in everyday life. Emotional closeness and mutual understanding are found to be of great importance for successful partnerships.

Although violence in families can be found, it is not common. In most cases, even separations and divorces are consensual and are accomplished deliberately and in a rational way.

Marital satisfaction changes in the course of marriage, usually resembling a U-curve. At the beginning, marital satisfaction, mutual love, and affection are very high. At the time of childbirth, partners' contentment with their marriage significantly declines. This is partly due to the fact that men desist from doing household chores. When the second child is born, men work longer and spend even less time at home with their family. When children reach puberty, satisfaction falls to the lowest point. Bit by bit satisfaction rises again and marital relationships reach a high level of intimacy and common understanding again in the empty-nest stage (Austrian Family Report, 1999).

Couples without children face a similar pattern. However, childlessness sometimes causes severe conflicts. On the one hand,

affection, good communication, love, and tenderness as well as sexuality are very important for childless partnerships. On the other hand, young couples in particular try to maintain their individuality and freedom to pursue professional goals and other activities advancing their personal development.

6. FAMILY STRESSES AND VIOLENCE

Partnerships perpetually have to meet new challenges in their everyday lives. Numerous studies indicate that children constitute an important stress factor, in particular for women who try to combine work and family, job and childcare. Depending on the availability of part-time jobs and childcare facilities, the effort to combine work and family can be a very stressful task. At present there exist numerous childcare facilities in Austria for children over 3 years of age, but very few institutions that care for children under the age of 3.

In Austria, children go to school in the morning and in the early afternoon. Consequently, childcare after school requires deliberate time management in families where both parents are working full-time. Some schools offer after-school day care, which, however, is difficult for low-income families to afford. Children's school achievements represent another possible stressor. In fact, many pupils find studying rather demanding and Austrian families spend a lot of money for private tutorials.

Discrepancies between parents on how to bring up their children might also represent an important stress factor, though no relevant studies yet exist.

Recapitulating, stress may cause domestic violence, though not always. In the majority of cases, violent hands are laid on children and women, although men are sometimes mistreated.

The *Vienna Youth Health Report* (2002), a representative study of young people between ages 15 and 24 living in Vienna, indicates that 11% of young girls and boys experience physical violence. However, there exist significant gender differences. Whereas boys are more often physically attacked, girls rather experience verbal and psychic violence. Furthermore, boys report that two-thirds of violence originates from their father. Conversely, girls experience 58% of violence from their mother. Ten percent of both boys and girls report having been threatened with being sent to an "approved" school. However, more than 50% say they are allowed to criticize their parents, and one-third of the interviewed boys and 44% of the girls say that their parents allow contradiction.

The data on violence differs in various studies. Depending on the definition of violence, the number of people having experienced violence (at least in the form of slaps) is as high as 80%. Psychic violence is very difficult to measure.

Newspapers and other media increasingly report sexual harassment. Out of 622 reported cases of physical violence against children within 1 recent year, 259 were sexual. In most cases, the abused children are below 10 or 11, meaning below puberty. These data were collected from doctors in 1994. There is no clear profile of the abuser. Therefore, violent behavior and sexual harassment might relate in part to the attitude toward sexuality rather than to social milieus.

Concerning violence against women, it is estimated that 5% to 10% of women experience violence in their partnership. Major crimes against women are often committed out of jealousy. Low income, financial difficulties, and alcohol abuse also play a significant role in such crimes. The increasing number of reported cases in recent years can presumably be explained by the greater willingness of women to report them, rather than

an effective rise of violent crimes, and there is a law in process that will define sexual harassment within marriage as a crime. This will have significant consequences on criminal proceedings.

7. DIVORCE, SEPARATION, AND REMARRIAGE

Divorce: Data and Development

In Austria the rate of divorces has considerably risen during recent decades. Actually the divorce rate is at 46% and is expected to remain stable at this level. However, this does not mean that 46% of marriages are going to end in divorce. The divorce rate takes into account the number of divorces and the number of marriages and relates them to each other. Therefore, the divorce rate automatically rises as the marriage rate falls. This is exactly what has happened during the last three decades.

Divorced families have become a natural constituent part of Austrian society. While only 1.1 of 1,000 inhabitants divorced in 1961, at the turn of the 21st century, 2.5 of 1,000 inhabitants were divorcing in a single year. In absolute numbers, this meant 8,000 divorces in 1961 and 20,600 in 2001.

The typical age at the time of divorce has risen from the early 30s to the late 30s. This can largely be explained by the higher age of people at the time of marriage and by the increasing duration of marriages. At present, marriages in Austria last an average 9.5 years. However, we find that most divorces take place within the first years of marriage and that the number of divorces reaches its peak in the fourth year.

Many people who divorce marry again. About 60% of divorced people under the age of 30 remarry. However, after the age of 30 years, there are significant gender differences: Fifty-five percent of divorced men but only 46% of divorced women marry again

within 10 years after divorce. Generally, partnerships after remarriage are lifelong, and very few people divorce a second time.

Separation of Unmarried Couples

Whereas the number of marriages has declined, nonmarital cohabitation has become more and more popular. However, it is very difficult to give exact figures and to analyze the quality and duration of these relationships. People living together in cohabitation are for the most part in their 20s. Following the definition of cohabitation as living together and sharing a household with a partner over months, the number of unmarried people living together is in all probability underestimated. Furthermore, there exist various forms of cohabitation, since both partners can live in one household during the week but can visit their parents separately or together on weekends. They can also live together in one household, but one or both partners can still officially live in their parents' household. In this way nonmarital cohabitation precedes marital cohabitation rather than replacing it. The *Family and Fertility Survey* (Doblhammer et al., 1996) shows that more than 50% of cohabiting couples marry after 6 years of cohabitation.

In the context of these developments, the number of nonmarital births has risen considerably since the late 20th century. While in 1960 13% of children were born out of wedlock, in 2001 33% of children were born to an unmarried mother. In contrast to the former practice that couples married when they were expecting a child, it is common at present that they remain unmarried or marry later on.

At this point it might be interesting to go back about 100 years. During the 19th century, Austria was an agricultural society, with more than 70% of the population involved in agriculture. At that time men

could only marry when their parents' property and house were handed down to them. This was usually at the age of 30, when the old farmer was about to die. Thus, the age at the time of marriage was the same as nowadays.

Furthermore, marriage was strongly connected to income and property. This is why maidens and farm laborers of the lower classes could not marry. However, they had children and consequently the rate of extra-marital births was rather high—even though for different reasons than these days.

In many ways, cohabiting couples resemble married people in sharing similar values such as fidelity. However, the risk of separation is higher than among married couples. The Austrian law still differs for married couples and couples living together in nonmarital cohabitation. Consequently, different legal obligations and rights apply. However, the law that applies in the case of divorce/separation of families and cohabitators has largely been equalized concerning the maintenance obligation, the amount of alimony for children, and the custody of children.

New Forms of Living Together as a Consequence of Divorce

As a consequence of numerous patterns of cohabitation and the increasing number of divorced families, new forms of family structure are emerging. These are the single-parent family, the stepfamily, and the patchwork family.

Single-parent families may be the result of separation of unmarried or of divorced couples. At a young age it often happens that men leave their partner because of an unintentional pregnancy and the woman's decision to give birth to their child. At higher ages single parents are mostly an outcome of divorce. While young single mothers are often financially suffering and on the verge of poverty, single parents in their 40s are self-supporting and better off.

Remarriage often results in stepfamilies, which represent about 6% of the Austrian population. Patchwork families are families in which children of previous and present marriages live together. Unfortunately, there are no statistical data on the number of step- or patchwork families in Austria.

LATs as "Separated Marriage"?

Whereas remarriage was the common practice when divorce rates were beginning to increase, at present a new kind of partnership is seemingly about to emerge—so-called LATs (living apart together relationships). Couples are living in different households, regardless of whether they are married or not. This might be for professional or for personal reasons. They might think that living in separate households will strengthen their partnership rather than weaken it. It is very difficult to figure out how many people are living in such an arrangement. This is especially true when young people forming a couple but living in their parents' homes are counted among LATs. However, these young couples do not represent the typical LATs. LATs are rather a form of partnership at a higher age when both partners follow individual careers, or other biographical experiences have led to this form of living apart together.

How Children Are Affected

About 20% of children up to the age of 19 are affected by the divorce of their parents. There is a multiplicity of recent studies dealing with long-term consequences of divorce. However, many studies interpret the data from an ideological point of view, focusing on either the disadvantages or advantages of divorce, while neglecting the other aspects.

In the first place, it is quite evident that children suffer after divorce for several months or even years. However, we also have to question the impact of an existing

but conflict-filled partnership on a child. Furthermore, we might also consider the economic effect of separation or divorce. Children raised by single parents have a higher risk of poverty. However, this risk strongly relates to the age and employment of the single parent. It can also be argued that divorce and remarriage extend the children's social networks.

The right of custody, which allows courts to decide on the basis of specific criteria with whom the child will live, constitutes an essential but often contentious issue in the course of divorce. Before joint custody of children was adopted in 2001, only one parent was entitled to have custody. Joint custody certainly allows children to more easily maintain a good relationship with both parents after divorce. Consistent with Haller (1998), who focused on the risk of separation and divorce among people whose parents divorced, the quality of the relationship between parents and children after divorce is crucial for the well-being of children and their later partnerships.

8. KINSHIP

In Austria, the word *family* usually refers to nuclear families consisting of parents and their children, or single parents and their child or children.

In Austria, relatives have no legal obligations and hardly play any role in the education of children. In most families relatives apart from grandparents only meet occasionally at momentous occasions, such as birthdays or Christmas. However, the frequency of family reunions depends on the quality of relationships as well as spatial distance. Living more than 30 minutes travel time apart lowers the chance of meeting frequently.

Kinship and its minor role in Austria can be demonstrated by considering the law of succession. Generally speaking the nearest

relative inherits. In most cases these are spouses and children or their descendants. If there are no near relatives to whom the inheritance can be handed down, the decedent's siblings, nephews, or nieces will inherit. If they are not available, the grandparents or their descendants will inherit. Partners, parents-in-law, brothers-in-law, and sisters-in-law have no right to inherit by law. However, this only applies if there is no last will and testament in which the descendant explicitly expresses his wishes for the inheritance. Finally, although law of succession differs between spouses and nonmarried partners, this has no consequences for their children, who are in any case inheritors.

Concerning marriage there are some rules that are mainly meant to prevent incestuous relationships between relatives. Consequently the marriage of relatives by blood is prohibited, which means that father and daughter, grandparent and grandchild, siblings, and stepsiblings are not allowed to marry.

9. AGING AND DEATH

Aging

In Austria most elderly are in good health until about age 75. Demographics indicate gender differences in life expectancy. While women's life expectancy has been about 82 since the beginning of the 21st century, men are expected to live 76 years. As a result of this difference, the proportion of widowed women is higher than that of widowed men. While about 51% of women aged over 75 live alone, only 17% of men at the same age outlive their wives. Consequently, there are more elderly women than men who require continuous healthcare. In many cases their daughters, 20 to 30 years younger, take on their care.

The majority of elderly are not affected by poverty because of the Austrian pension scheme, which allows people to receive an adequate pension. However, the amount

of pension depends on a person's profession and former income. Therefore, people with low income such as unskilled workers, women, and the self-employed have a higher risk of poverty. In Austria about 17% of all households live at the poverty level. Forty-two percent of these households are households of old people.

It might be interesting to note that people reach their highest level of income between ages 50 and 60, by which time they have worked for many years and their children have moved out. It is worth mentioning that the transfer of social and economic resources from aging people to the young generation is higher than the other way around, even when the necessary care of older people is taken into consideration. (See Rosenmayr, 2000, p. 236.)

Elderly people are embedded in generational relationships and are therefore seldom isolated. About 50% of families consist of three generations, and 27% of four generations. In many families, grandparents actively take part in family life and some 40% of the elderly live with their children or children-in-law, and another 23% live nearby.

The relationship between grandparents and grandchildren is reportedly very good, and even better than between grandparents and their own children. At this point, it is worth mentioning that individuals tend to rate their personal relationship to other generations better than they perceive intergenerational relationships between young and old people in general. A total of 38% of Austrians fear that intergenerational relationships will decline. Pessimism prevails particularly among the age-group of 46- to 60-year-olds, 48% of whom fear that the situation will deteriorate, as compared with 32% of those 45 and under.

Over the last decade, public opinion has changed considerably with regard to old people. In 1989, only 35% called on old people to renounce their rights and interests and to make way for young people. Ten

years later 53% had the same opinion. Even older people support this idea, at least at the verbal level.

At the macro level the proportion of the total national payroll redistributed to the parents' and children's generations is a useful indicator for the quality of intergenerational relations. In Austria, some 22.8% of the total payroll, plus a substantial contribution from the federal budget, is paid as old-age pensions to the retired. Only 3% of the total payroll is spent on family allowance to children.

In most cases, the elderly can expect emotional, social, or material help from their family. Old people are usually cared for by their daughters. Employment is the main reason (far more frequently than any other) why people do not want to or are not able to care for their parents. Incidentally, this is cited more often by employed women than by men.

If children care for their elderly parents, they do so for reasons of gratitude or obligation rather than for the abstract reason of family solidarity. It seems that the more parents helped their children, the more they can count on their children's help later on.

Looking at all age-groups in society, young people experience more situations that require help than do elderly. They need someone to talk to, to do housework and repairs, to look out for each other in case of illness, and so on. The *Generations Study* of 1998 concluded that conflict between generations is more apparent in the public media and social policy discourses than in the family sphere itself (Majce, 2000).

Death

Cancer and diseases of the cardiovascular system are the main causes of death in Austria these days. The process of dying mainly takes place in hospitals, nursing homes, and other institutions, though about one-third die at home. The percentage of

people (66%) dying in a hospital is highest in the 70- to 74-year-old age group. With a further increase in age, the proportion of people dying in a hospital decreases so that among people aged 95 and above only about 40% die in a hospital, and nearly as many (38%) die at home. The number of people aged 75 and above dying in nursing homes has risen significantly since 1990.

The process of dying is much more institutionalized in urban areas than in rural areas, and it is considered "advanced" to leave dying people to caring institutions, where it is assumed that they will receive adequate help and support. Consequently, families often exclude old family members because they feel they do not know how to cope with the process of dying. Therefore, many families avoid facing death, which means that dying persons often experience fear and isolation. The hospice movement tries to offer emotional support and professional care so that those dying away from home and family will have some sense of dignity.

It is internationally accepted that women deal better with their partner's death than do men, whose mortality risk increases significantly after the death of their wife/partner. In most cases women regain a reasonably normal life after shock, grief, and mourning. However, it often takes longer than a year to accept one's partner's death and to adapt to the new situation.

10. FAMILY AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS

Family policy is one of the central political issues in Austria. Within the European Union, it is assigned to the individual countries and not under the responsibility of the European Commission. We will discuss some crucial developments of the Austrian family policy since the Year of the Family in 1994.

The Family Fund (FLAF)

The Family Fund, which was introduced in 1954, constitutes an effective tool to support families by financing specific family-policy measures at the federal level. Family allowance, for example, is intended to cover the maintenance costs of children. Over the past 20 years, the Family Fund has increasingly developed into an instrument to finance an even greater range of family policy measures, but has failed to tap new financial resources. Its main resource is a payroll tax of 4.5%¹ (6% before 1980).

In 1999, 60% of the Family Fund's expenditures were designed for family allowance (compared with some 88% in 1970). Another 20% was primarily intended to be used for other measures such as parental leave and the mother-child booklet scheme of payments in return for medical checkups (compared with 2.8% in 1975). Finally, 9% is intended for children's free travel to school and free schoolbooks. Since 2001 the Family Fund also covers family-related research studies.

Depending on the individual's income, a specific percentage of payroll tax is transferred to the FLAF. The fund's distributive effect includes a strong vertical component: up to the sixth income decile, households with children are the net recipients. The lowest quarter contributes 9.8% of the fund's revenues and receives 29% of its expenditures; the top quarter contributes 44.7% and receives 19.2%.

In 2001 the Austrian government enacted a law that transformed the previous child benefit, which was intended to support parents who worked before parenthood, into a general benefit payable to all parents regardless of whether they were employed or not. Consequently, students may receive the child benefit.

At present the child benefit is at €430 per month for up to 30 months. In case the father also takes a leave for 6 months, the

child benefit is allocated for a further 6 months. For additional income, a ceiling of about €1,136 per month has been introduced. Although the childcare benefit is very controversial and holds the risk that women are likely not to work anymore, at present there is no political party pleading for its abolishment. Besides, evaluations have shown so far that the childcare benefit has only minor effects on women's participation in the workforce, while it reduces poverty.

In 2003 a new pension scheme was established that implies substantive changes to both the private insurance system and the state-run insurance system. In Austria the central problem is that many employees retire quite early. Consequently, only one-third of people between 55 and 65 who are able to work actually are working. The new scheme envisages a continual rise in the retirement age, and will not allow people to go on early pension. In addition, the years women spend caring for their children are counted among preretirement years.

Counseling and Parental Education

These days families and family members face changes that frequently exhaust their capacities. Therefore, a supportive and preventive backup system is of great importance. Family-counseling and parental-education systems currently in place undertake this task of supporting families. Counseling is provided in accordance with the 1974 Act to Promote Family Counselling. In 2000 there were about 305 family-counseling centers with a staff of about 2,000 counselors available in Austria.

Over time most centers have become specialized, focusing on specific target groups and specific contents. They range from educational counseling to marriage counseling and their work concentrates on problematic issues related to relationships, separation/divorce, and education. In many cases, interdisciplinary

teams have been very successful. As a consequence, many counselors dream of so-called multifunctional centers that offer a variety of different psychological and social services. These “one-stop shops” could provide help for many family-related problems.

At the federal level, parental education has been neglected so far, although there has been some improvement since the Year of the Family in 1994. Finally, the federal government substantially increased funding for parental education from €0.22 to 2.2 million in 2000.

Family Audit

In Austria the government encourages the so-called Family Audit. At the beginning, the

Family Audit was intended to analyze firms with regard to their family friendliness and later on it was extended to communities and villages.

The priority objective with regard to firms is the improvement of the work and family interface. Firms that participated and reached a high standard of family friendliness were honored by the government, which labeled them “family-friendly firms.”

Communities are also subject to extensive analysis of their family and child friendliness. Following such analysis, programs for improvement are implemented. The participation of inhabitants and children in particular is essential to ensure success. In 2003 the first family-friendly community was honored by the Austrian government.

NOTE

1. For 2001, revenues under this title are expected to be €3.2 billion, out of total fund revenues of €4.4 billion.

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