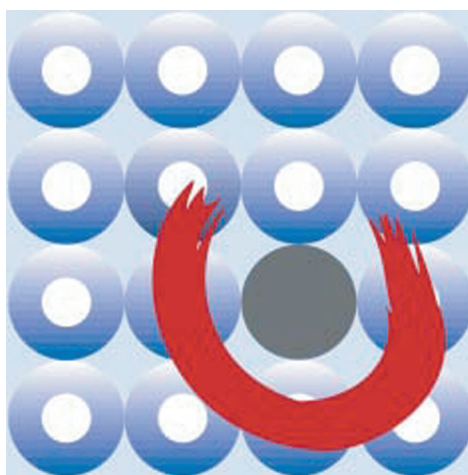


National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2003-2005

Implementation report and updating



NAP inclusion

Co-ordination: Austrian Federal Ministry of Social Security, Generations and
Consumer Protection on behalf of the Council of Ministers

**National Action Plan
for Social Inclusion
2003-2005**

Implementation report and updating

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National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2003-2005

Implementation report and updating

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1. Trends and challenges

1.1. Trends

Risk-of-poverty

The EUROSTAT at-risk-of-income-poverty rate in Austria amounted to 13.2% in 2003 and 12.7% (provisional figure) in 2004 according to EU-SILC. In spite of the still strained employment market situation, the increase in welfare expenditure (social expenditure ratio) and the rise in female employment in particular have contributed to the slight decrease in the EUROSTAT at-risk-of-poverty rate.

Economy and labour market

GDP growth amounted to 2% in 2004 and was thus twice as high as the average for the years 2001 to 2003. However, it did not suffice to completely offset the increasing supply of labour.

Employment (independent and self-employed gainfully employed people, excluding marginal part-time jobs) rose by 32,200 and unemployment by 7,700 people in 2003. In 2004, employment increased by 20,000 people and unemployment by 3,800 people (register data).

The employment rate rose steadily until 2003 to 69.0%, whereby there was an increase to 61.7% in the case of women and a decrease to 76.4% with men. Due to the change in the data collection method of the microcensus,¹ lower ratios (67.8% overall, 60.7% women, 74.9% men) are reported by EUROSTAT for 2004 than in the previous year. In view of the development to be followed in the register data of the Public Employment Service [AMS] and of the Central Association of Social Insurance Institutions, this decrease should be interpreted as a statistical artefact and not as a real trend. The register-data indicates an increase in employment and shows a constant employment rate (excluding marginal part-time jobs) from 2003 to 2004.

Unemployment has risen since 2000, but the rate of increase has slowed down since 2003. The unemployment rate - according to the EUROSTAT definition - amounted to 4.3% in 2003, 4.5% in 2004 and 4.6% in April 2005. Notwithstanding this slightly rising trend, Austria continues to have the third-lowest unemployment rate in the EU. The ratio for women rose from 4.4% to 5.2% from 2002 to 2004, while the ratio in the case of men remained constant at 3.9%.

The long-term unemployment rate - according to the EUROSTAT definition - stood at 1.1% in 2002 and at 1.2% in 2003 and 2004 (EU average 2004: 4.1%). Compared with 2002, the number of people unemployed for longer than 1 year has increased from 12,900 to 20,400. The long-term unemployment rate for women changed from 1.2% to 1.3% and that for men from 1.2% to 1.1%.

The Public Employment Service register data records a decrease in unemployment with the 15 to 24-year-olds for 2004 compared with 2003. However, in the first half of 2005, youth unemployment has risen again. The seasonally-adjusted unemployment rate - according to the EUROSTAT definition - for 15 to 24-year-olds amounted to 10.2% in April 2005 (11.7% for women, 8.9% for men). The EU-25 average amounted to 19.0%.

In the case of disabled people, a fall in the number of people registered as unemployed from 31,040 to 28,860 has been recorded since 2002.

¹ The data reported by EUROSTAT on employment is based on the microcensus and shows leaps - which do not correspond to reality - in the employment trend and unemployment between 2003 and 2004. Due to a significant change in the data collection of the microcensus 2004 (random sample, data collection method), the figures reported for 2004 should not be compared with those of the previous years.

Unemployment of the foreign labour force is greater than that for nationals (unemployment rate according to Public Employment Service register data: 9.8% in 2003 and 10% in 2004).

Budget consolidation with simultaneous increase in the social expenditure ratio

For the purposes of a sustainable development for younger and future generations, the fiscal policy since 2000 has been characterised by the clear endeavour to reduce the budget deficit and the government debts. The budget deficit stood at 1.1% in 2003 and at 1.2% of GDP in 2004 and thus amounted to less than half the EU average.

In spite of the budget consolidation, an increasing importance has been granted to the means for the expansion of opportunities and for the fight against social exclusion. The social expenditure ratio has risen since 2000 from 28.4% to 29.5% in 2003 (2001: 28.7%, 2002: 29.2%). This is not only the consequence of countercyclical effects of the social expenditure ratio, but also the result of targeted additional investments in the welfare state.

Benefit improvements and consolidation measures

The budget for active employment market measures was considerably increased (3.1.2.). Additional funds were made available (3.1.2.) for the promotion of employment market opportunities for disabled people ("the disability billion"). The income of recipients of low unemployment and unemployment assistance benefits was increased (3.1.4.). The equalisation supplement reference rates for low pensions, up to the level at which there is entitlement to additional state benefits, were increased close to the EUROSTAT at-risk-of-poverty thresholds (3.1.4.). The tax reforms make low gross annual incomes (less than EUR 15,750) tax-free from 2005. The threshold value for the entitlement to a negative tax was increased from EUR 8,400 to EUR 10,600 (3.1.2.).

In order to facilitate a better reconciliation of family and work and better development opportunities for children, the supply of childcare places was increased (3.1.3.). The expansion of mobile and inpatient care facilities for people who are older, in need of care or who are disabled was further expedited (3.2.4., 3.2.5.). The childcare benefit introduced in 2002 is contributing considerably to reducing the risk of child poverty (3.1.4.).

In addition to these increases in benefits, there was also a series of consolidation measures. In the case of a majority of the social security benefits, the annual value adjustments were fixed below the rate of inflation, but were socially differentiated and people with low income were granted full inflationary compensation. Measures in the health sector had resulted in higher co-payments in the case of medical benefits, but here also socially disadvantaged people and chronically sick people were exempt. The early retirement pensions were gradually abolished. A modified method of calculating the size of pension results in lower pensions in the case of new pensions as compared to the previous legal position, but the loss was capped at 5% maximum (3.1.4.).

A summarising analysis of the benefit-improving and consolidating measures shows that the benefit improvements primarily benefit the socially weak people and people in specific risk situations, while the economising measures predominantly affect sections of the population above the EUROSTAT at-risk-of-poverty threshold values.

Reinforcement of the active and enabling measures

The greatly increased budget for an active labour market policy made it possible for a steadily growing proportion of unemployed people to be included in labour market support schemes and, as a result, the proportion of long-term unemployed people continues to be very low.

Due to the additional budget resources for disabled people capable of work ("the disability billion") the number of disabled unemployed people was on the decline in 2003 and 2004 in spite of the generally rising risk of unemployment.

The provinces ("Länder"), which are responsible for social assistance schemes, report on an increasing range of educational, training and employment market measures for social assistance recipients, which are developed and implemented in co-operation with the Public Employment Service, partly within the framework of the Territorial Employment Pacts ("Territoriale Beschäftigungspakte") and within the scope of EQUAL projects.

Minimum social protection

The minimum income in pension insurance was further extended, in that the equalisation supplement rate for couples was brought closer to the at-risk-of-poverty threshold defined by EUROSTAT. In unemployment insurance, improvements were approved for recipients with low benefits. Since 2001, increases in income have been provided for up to 60% or 80% of the former wage. Nevertheless, in spite of the improvements in these two systems and in the case of family support (childcare benefit since 2002) the demand for benefits of subsidiary social assistance is accelerating primarily due to the increase in unemployment. The harmonisation of the social assistance systems announced in NAPincl could not be realised up to now.

1.2. Challenges

Child poverty

The Austrian policy is orientated to the central objective of equal opportunities for everyone. Special importance is accorded to the fight against child poverty in this regard.

Austria has a generous system - in an EU comparison - for monetary benefits for the coverage of a proportion of the additional costs associated with childcare. Therefore, households with children are not per se at risk-of-poverty.

Risk-of-poverty applies to an above-average extent if the parents are long-term unemployed or the mothers obtain no income from employment. In households with 1, 2 and 3 children and with gainfully employed mothers, the at-risk-of-poverty rates (5%, 7% and 9%) are lower than the average across Austria. If the mother is not gainfully employed, the risk-of-poverty increases in households with 1, 2 and 3 children to up to more than three times the extent: 13%, 24% and 31%. Only in households of single parents is the at-risk-of-poverty rate (28%) considerably greater than the average across Austria, in spite of gainful employment. The at-risk-of-poverty rate for all children (under 15 years of age) amounted to 15.6% in 2003.

In addition to the facilitation of sufficient job opportunities for the parents (e.g. through the additional earning opportunity with the childcare benefit), a further central element in the fight against child poverty lies in the improvement of the opportunities of disadvantaged young people in the educational system. Here, it is primarily about children, who have poor education conditions due to the family environment, show linguistic deficiencies or require additional support due to an impairment. An improvement in the development opportunities also includes childcare facilities in addition to the school education.

An additional focal point concerns an adequate offer of support, if families get into crisis situations, e.g. separations, violence, excessive indebtedness and financial crises.

Working life

The SILC statistics for the risk-of-poverty point to the key importance of gainful employment as a precondition for the prevention of the risk-of-poverty. The at-risk-of-poverty rate of households with long-term unemployed people amounts to 36%, of households with just part-time (primarily housewives) work 18% and of households with full gainful employment 6%. A job is, of course, a necessary precondition, but not at all sufficient to prevent the risk-of-poverty. In the case of one fifth of all people at risk-of-poverty, all household members capable of work are gainfully employed. Therefore, it is a further central objective of the fight against poverty to be able to offer income from employment that secures a livelihood.

Qualifications

People with a poor education have a considerably lower employment rate (and as a result a greater risk-of-poverty) than people with a higher education. In 2004, the employment rate of the 15 to 64-year-olds with no more than the minimum compulsory level of education amounted to 46% and was thus more than 25 percentage points (men) and more than 30 percentage points (women) lower than that of people with a higher level of education. Due to the changes in the employment market, the people integrated into the labour market with inadequate qualifications also come under ever-greater pressure. The unemployment rate (according to the EUROSTAT definition) of people with an ISCED 0-2 final examination (compulsory education as a maximum) was 9.7% in 2004, with people with an ISCED 3-4 final examination 4.2% and with people with an ISCED 5-6 final examination 3.0%. A central element in the education, training and employment policy must lie in offering tailor-made qualifications, particularly for groups of people with a poor education.

Reconciliation of family and work

The strong increase in the education standards of women, a continuous change in the gender-specific understanding of roles and targeted political measures (inter alia, the expansion of care facilities for children and people who are disabled, in need of care and older; introduction of the childcare allowance, legal entitlement to parental part-time work) resulted in a significant increase in female employment and especially the employment rate of mothers. The employment rate for mothers (with children under 15 years of age) rose, according to the microcensus, from 62.6% (1995) to 69.8% (2003) and is thus 8.1 percentage points above that for all women.

However, the supply of childcare facilities and the occupational entry paths and career opportunities for mothers are still inadequate. The means for a better reconciliation of family and work will be further expanded in the platform established in the summer of 2005, "The family alliance", as a coalition of politics, business, media and science.

Gender-specific discriminations

The risk-of-poverty for women, at 14% in 2003, is greater than that of men (12.3%). Although younger women have, in some cases, overtaken men of the same age in terms of education and training, the poorer education conditions of older women, inter alia, result in their being at greater risk of getting into social crisis. The segmentations still in existence in the education and training sector, in the working environment and also the gender-specific role allocations prevailing in society require various measures in order to give women equal opportunity with men.

Groups of the population with specific disadvantages

Without a suitably supportive environment, disabled people have only limited opportunities to adequately make provision for their livelihood and to participate in the various areas of life on equal terms. The risk-of-poverty is 19% (2003). The public sector regards it as its permanent aim to step

up education and employment aids for this group of people, to improve the range of support services, to provide subsistence support and payments for additional expenses and to combat any kind of discriminatory practices.

The mainly inferior linguistic conditions and qualifications of migrants, greater employment market problems and sometimes also generally difficult integration circumstances have as a consequence that the participation opportunities and the economic situation of migrants are below average. The at-risk-of-poverty rate lies at 27% (2003). Improvements in the education opportunities, in the linguistic capabilities, in the employment market integration, in the housing situation and in the general social participation are significant preconditions for an effective fight against social exclusion.

The "core groups" of poverty, such as inter alia homeless people, serious addicts or released prisoners with very complicated integration prospects require a multi-layered range of support services.

Financial safeguarding of the social protection systems

The social protection systems provide a significant contribution to the reduction of the poverty risk. By means of the social protection systems, the risk-of-poverty was reduced in 2003 from 42% to 13% for the total population and from 30% to 12% for households in the working age.

However, in addition to the safeguarding of the poverty-preventing components of these systems, it is necessary at the same time to certainly make provision now for the additional expenditure of the social protection systems to be expected in view of the demographic trend. Today, the fight against poverty must be in keeping with reforms geared to the future in order to safeguard the financial base of the social protection schemes for the future generations as well.

2. Evaluation of the objectives

The general strategy for the fight against poverty and social exclusion in Austria is based on the 4 general objectives of the European Council of Nice. These objectives are presented below in a modified form for the purposes of a problem-orientated means of representation:

- Creation of an employment-boosting economic growth;
- Integration into the employment market of all people capable of work even with limited prerequisites for employment; Minimum income from employment at a poverty-avoiding level;
- Adequate social protection in the event of general disability and unemployment, in old age, in the event of illness and need for nursing, for families etc.;
- Improvement of the participation opportunities, particularly of hitherto socially disadvantaged groups in key social areas, such as education, housing, health, etc.;
- Long-term financial safeguarding of the social protection systems through sustainable reforms;
- Mobilisation of the actors.

These objectives could be realised to a variable extent in recent years (see Sections 1 and 3). The varied achievement of objectives has to do with the fact that all the specified objectives on their own are indispensable for the fight against social exclusion, but at the same time are in some cases in an area of conflict with each other.

The consolidation of the state budget required under fiscal policy and the reforms for the sustainable safeguarding of pensions and of health care should be brought into line in a socially compatible form with the procurement of the necessary resources for the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

The endeavours to establish supply-side incentives for a stronger labour force participation of people without the best possible employment prospects must still include an adequate social protection for them and the minimum standards in working life must be preserved and extended.

The mobilisation of all actors facilitates a more overall view, a better utilisation of available resources and a more customer-friendly presentation of the range of benefits. On the other hand, limits are placed on a general strategy by various actors if diverging views of actors in sub-sections do not allow common policies or merely agreements on a lowest common denominator.

The Austrian policy against poverty endeavours to keep the areas of conflict between the objectives as minor as possible. Thus, in the case of structural reforms in the pension sector, great importance continues to be attached, and in some cases intensified, to the minimum floor level. The resources for social protection systems were also adequately funded in the ongoing state budget consolidation measures. During the reforms for an increased employment market integration of unemployed people and people with hitherto below average labour force participation, the obligations but also the rights of the people affected and the offers to them were extended. The involvement of actors (ministries, central, regional and local authorities, social partners, non-profit-making non-governmental providers of social services, lobbyists of affected groups, experts) is put into operation in the case of a multitude of planning initiatives and implementation measures. But the NAPincl also includes political measures and evaluations that will be viewed controversially by some actors.

3. Implementation report

3.1. Promotion of participation in working life and of access for every one to resources, rights, goods and services; avoidance of the risks of exclusion

The actions and outcomes in respect of the first two Nice objectives are shown together below, as the measures often have an impact that is concurrently poverty-alleviating and preventive. If appropriate, the plans notified for 2005 and 2006 are mentioned.

3.1.1. Education

In addition to the economic, labour market and social policies, education policy is one of the pillars in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. The NAPincl is pursuing the objective of improving educational prospects, particularly of disadvantaged children and young people.

The target groups are

- pupils and young people with inadequate success at school (objective: reduction in the percentage of the group with a compulsory school-leaving certificate as a maximum),
- young people who obtain no adequate reading and writing capabilities by the end of their school career due to personal impairments or learning handicaps (objective: improvement in the reading capabilities),
- pupils from migrant families (objective: harmonisation of the involvement in education to that of nationals) and
- physically and mentally impaired young people (objective: greater involvement in integrated teaching).

The implementation of the EU programme YOUTH is directed in particular, in Austria, at the reaching and inclusion of disadvantaged young people. The aim here is to contribute to the enhancement of life-skills and employability of all participating young people through the provision of both non-formal and informal learning opportunities.

Other considerations of an education policy geared to the expansion of opportunities are

- promotion of women (objective: reduction in the gender-specific differences in educational success),
- Initiatives in the education sector with information and communications technologies (objective: combating of the "digital divide") and
- the promotion of lifelong learning (objective: greater involvement particularly of people with poor qualifications).

Young people with inadequate success at school

The number of 18 to 24-year-olds, who show no education or training qualifications beyond the compulsory school-leaving certificate reduced further in the reporting period (2002: 9.5%, 2003: 9.2%, 2004: 9.2%). In 2004, the corresponding ratio with women, at 8.5%, is lower than men (9.9%) for the first time.

Through the amendment of the Austrian School Education Act ("Schulunterrichtsgesetz"), pupils who have not successfully completed the general secondary school or the pre-vocational year can catch up on the compulsory school-leaving certificate in a 10th or 11th school year free of charge from the 2003/2004 school year. From 2003 to 2005, the number of participants in measures to catch up on the compulsory school-leaving certificate increased from 1,000 to 1,200. EUR 730,000 in education department grants was expended for this purpose in the 2002/03 school year and that amount increased to EUR 940,000 for the 2004/05 school year. In addition, national funds from the provinces and the Public Employment Service etc. were contributed for ESF projects, which are not included here.

In the context of an international comparison of pupil performances (PISA 2003), 20% of 15-year-old pupils (28% of boys and 13% of girls) were identified with a reading capability at level 1 or below that. In order to increase reading capabilities, the campaign "Fit to read" (Lesefit) was launched in elementary schools. "Salzburg reading screening" (method of testing to establish basal reading proficiency) was utilised with 60,000 pupils. Various projects, such as a reading night, library quiz or reading breakfast, are arranged in schools. Already whole villages are organising reading initiatives. In the process, not only are primary school children included in reading projects but also the education network, the parents and other people.

The initiative "Fit to read – the ability to read means the ability to learn" will be extended by "Promote reading". The central elements are an enhanced range of offers in advanced training for teachers, the development of specific teaching materials, the implementation of a reading screening process in the primary school and in secondary school level I. The encouragement of pupils with another first language than German, the taking into consideration of gender-specific aspects and reading promotion offers in the vocational school sector are additional central elements of the "Promote reading!" initiative.

In line with the reform proposals, with the "Future Commission" established by the Austrian Ministry of Education and with the outcome of the reform consultation "Education" in February 2005 with all parties in parliament, children with still inadequately developed knowledge of German are to be specially supported, from the 2005/06 school year, in pilot projects in the year before entry into school and thus prepared for entry into school.

Children and young people with impairments

An education tailored to the needs of children and young people with disabilities or with a need for special educational support will be offered both in special schools and within the framework of integrated classes (joint teaching of disabled and non-disabled pupils). Parents and pupils have the legal option to choose between the integrated classes or attendance at a special school. Since the legal establishment of integrated classes in the primary school, the general secondary school or the lower level of the academic secondary school, these offers are being increasingly taken up. From 1997/1998 to 2002/2003, the number of pupils in special schools decreased from 16,000 to 13,500, while the number of pupils with a need for special educational support within the framework of the integrated classes in primary and general secondary schools has risen by 62% from 9,000 to 14,450 from 1997/98 to 2002/03.

A system of "mobile services" (e.g. speech therapists, counselling teachers for pupils with social – emotive problems, so-called support assistants ("Stützlehrer/innen") in individual integration, pupil counsellors etc.) and employees in school psychology cover the multitude of counselling and care services. Furthermore, special education centres, whose function it is to co-ordinate all measures for a successful implementation of integrated classes, are an important regional hub for the networking of all educational and extra-mural facilities, which are involved in the support and education or (vocational) training of children and young people with disabilities or impairments. These offers contribute to giving the children and young people the best possible development

opportunities. In 2004, EUR 12 million was additionally provided to the federal provinces for further improvements to structural measures in the compulsory school sector.

On the basis of the existing statutory provisions, deviations from the curriculum may be established in lower secondary school level I (general secondary school or academic secondary school – lower level) and secondary school level II (upper level form of academic secondary school, secondary technical and vocational schools and colleges) by the responsible school authority for pupils with physical or sensory disabilities, by means of which the pupils are better enabled to achieve the curriculum objectives of the pertinent type of school. Furthermore, additional remedial teaching - if necessary - is provided for these pupils, for which separate resources of value (“Werteinheiten”) are provided.

Measures in the school - career transition area, such as "clearing", are in the competency of the Federal Offices for Social Affairs and are implemented in co-operation with the schools and the school authorities of the provinces (see 3.1.2.).

As a consequence of an amendment to the Austrian Vocational Training Act 2003 (“Berufsausbildungsgesetz”), young people with disabilities/impairments can complete an apprenticeship within the framework of an apprenticeship and vocational study time extended by up to two years or acquire partial qualifications under an apprenticeship contract for the later exercising of a profession (see 3.1.2.).

Pupils with another first language than German

In the 2002/03 school year, 12% of all pupils (and more than 15% of all compulsory school pupils) in Austria had another first language than German. Progress could be achieved in respect of the objective formulated in the NAPincl to harmonise the involvement in education of these people in academic secondary schools to that of pupils with a German mother tongue. In the 2000/01 school year, 7.6% of pupils from academic secondary schools had another first language than German, in 2002/03 it was 8.9%. Their percentage in special schools reduced from 23.3% to 22%, but is still greatly disproportionate.

The offer of the elective subject or of the non-binding practice of teaching the mother tongue (“Muttersprachlicher Unterricht”) is accepted by approximately 20% of pupils with another first language than German. The number of pupils involved in that increased by 2% from 2002/03 to 2003/04. Currently, 17 languages are offered within the framework of teaching the mother tongue, whereby the biggest percentage in Austria is apportionable to Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian and Turkish.

In the years 2003 and 2004, education measures were promoted, which take into account the special living conditions of adult migrants. Low-threshold educational offers and education consultations are meant to provide an entry to an educational course, which can lead up to acquisition of the Austrian language diploma or the European Computer Driving Licence. In the project period 2003 and 2004, approximately 2,200 migrants completed courses specifically evolved for this target group. The education measures were supported with EUR 877,000 (national funds and ESF funds).

Women

The generally higher risk-of-poverty for women is the result, inter alia, of the considerably poorer education conditions of the older women's age groups compared with those of men. However, women benefited disproportionately from the education offensives in past decades, which will result in better employment and earnings prospects for women.

The percentage of 18 to 24-year-old women with a compulsory school-leaving certificate as a maximum reduced from 17.3% to 10.3% from 1995 to 2002. The trend continued in 2003 with a

share of 9.7% and actually 8.5% in 2004. The proportion of 18 to 24-year-old women with none or poor educational qualifications is now already lower than that for men of the same age, while even with the 25 to 29-year-olds 20.4% of women and 14.5% of men have no final examination beyond the compulsory school.

Young women have already overtaken men of the same age in relation to the final exams and university degrees. More girls than boys conclude with a final exam (59% at an academic secondary school and 53% at a secondary technical and vocational school).

However, the choice made by students between types of school still takes place in an unbalanced way, e.g. the percentage of girls in colleges for occupation in food and beverage industry amounts to between 90% (medium level secondary colleges) and 93% (higher level secondary colleges). On the other hand, the percentage of girls in the technical and vocational schools lies at 22% and in the secondary technical colleges at 11%. In technical courses of universities of applied sciences women are represented with 22%.

The action plan "Gender mainstreaming and promotion of women in the school and adult education" was superseded at the end of 2003 by the action plan "Gender mainstreaming and gender-sensitive education" (which applies until the end of 2006).

The project "Gender mainstreaming cluster schools" was launched in November 2003: Cluster schools develop specific strategies and measures, which should facilitate the implementation of gender mainstreaming at the comprehensive school level. Another project "Gender mainstreaming at teacher training colleges" extends to the area of teacher training (education, vocational education and religious education colleges). The objectives are the taking into consideration of gender mainstreaming in study courses, in teaching courses and research projects as well as a balanced ratio of the sexes in the composition of committees.

The ESF project "READY" runs from 2001 until the end of 2006. Approximately 450 - 500 girls as well as numerous teachers participate in the workshops annually. The objective is the widening of the careers spectrum for girls. The ESF project "FIT – girls in technology" runs from 2000 until 2006. Approximately 8,000 female students from upper level form of academic secondary schools are directly reached by FIT per annum. In the context of the project "MUT – girls in technology", a total of 92 different consultation and sensitisation schemes have been held so far and, in the process, around 840 people were reached. The measures running until 2006 involve not just the reduction of gender-specific segregation in the training and employment market and the increase in the percentage of girls in "non-traditional" occupational fields, but also the establishment of gender-awareness in the key training and advanced training structures.

Information and communications technologies in the educational system

It is an important objective to prevent the risk of the "digital divide". The basic skills for the utilisation of information and communications technologies should be conveyed to as many pupils as possible. In the context of the strategy "eFit-Austria", a major IT initiative was carried out in the education sector for the improvement of the IT infrastructure in schools and for the enhancement of quality in the education system.

A few examples (position in March 2005):

- All schools have an Internet connection, 100 pupils in primary schools get 8 PCs on average and there are 20 - 25 PCs at vocational secondary schools.
- Up until December 2004, 470,000 individual examinations were taken for the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL).
- The computer billion: Between 2001 and 2003, a total of EUR 35.2 million was provided for the expansion of the IT infrastructure in public and private schools. In 2004,

EUR 5,730,000 was utilised for innovative IT projects from the billion for education innovation.

- In the 2004/05 school year, 150 secondary schools are offering notebook classes and a total of 10,200 pupils are benefiting from this.
- IT integration in classes means more IT capabilities for teachers. Up to the middle of 2004, 40,000 teachers completed IT courses.
- In the context of the eContent initiative for classes, a lot of eLearning materials were completed by March 2005 for a broad range of subjects as subject portals or freely available products on education servers.

In the years 2003 and 2004, education measures were supported in the context of the IT further education offensive (eFit-Austria), which were directed specifically at women, who had no or little experience with new technologies. The courses offered a low-threshold access to computers, the Internet and learning software and conveyed key qualifications. The offers were constructed in a modular form, offered open forms of learning and in some cases individual learning accompaniment. In the 2003 and 2004 project period, 2,700 women participated in education measures. The grant total for this period represents EUR 477,000 (national and ESF funds).

Lifelong learning

An ever-greater significance is accorded to further education schemes after school and after the formal education and they are also taken up by more and more people. In 2000, 8.3% of 25 to 64-year-olds did so and 12% in 2004. In contrast to 2000, there was already a higher percentage of women in 2004 who participated in further education schemes (12.5% women and 11.5% men).

A comparison of the involvement of people with different education standards shows a markedly below average involvement of people with an ISCED 0-2 final examination (4% compared with 13.4% of people with an ISCED 3-6 final examination).

3.1.2. Working life

For people capable of work, integration in the employment market is the most effective way of avoiding poverty. The Austrian "NAP-Employment" describes the strategies put into practice to increase involvement in working life, to improve employment careers and to combat unemployment. Therefore, the effects are presented in the "NAPIncl" on those specific sections of the population in particular, which are particularly at risk of getting into social hardships due to unemployment or being significantly adversely affected in their subsequent professional career.

The employment policy reacted to the increase in the pressure of problems in the employment market with greatly increasing the funds of the labour market support schemes. The expenditure for an active labour market policy (including part of the ESF and funds of the unemployment insurance for active measures) has increased by 63% compared with the year 2001 with an amount of EUR 1,540 million in 2004. The ratio of the active labour market policy to the total expenditure for the Public Employment Service rose in this period from 20% to 32%. The 2004 level of funds will be further increased in the years 2005 and 2006 as well. The Public Employment Service is putting in approximately EUR 403 million for qualification schemes. That corresponds to a share of approximately 57% in the budget of the Public Employment Service for active labour market policy.

A disproportionate share of the active employment policy is benefiting the sections of the population more greatly at risk. In 2003 and 2004, out of the people supported, 55% was apportioned to women. The ratio of young people to all supported people rose from 28% to 30% from 2003 to 2004. This ratio was considerably greater than the ratio of young people to all unemployed people. The ratio of foreign nationals of the benefit recipients increased from 11% in

2003 to 12% in 2004. The ratio of disabled people of the benefit recipients was 10% in each case in 2003 and 2004.

Young people

Against the background of an increased problem in the youth employment market and of an ongoing strained situation in the apprenticeship market, the active labour market policy for young people was greatly stepped up. Thus, the number of under 25-year-olds included annually in various support programmes of the Public Employment Service could be increased, from 2001 to 2004, by 59% from approximately 58,000 (women's share: 55.1%) to around 92,000 (women's share: 52.5%). This increase turned out somewhat greater in the case of the 20 to 24-year-olds with a plus of approximately 70% (to approximately 49,000) than with the up to 19-year-olds (by approximately +49% to around 44,000).

At the same time, the budget put into the youth sector also rose considerably: In 2004, 266 million was expended from the active support budget and via the mobilisation of passive funds for young people (under 25 years of age), which represents an increase of 57% compared with the year 2001.

This development is primarily attributable to the gradual expansion of measures for young people seeking an apprenticeship in accordance with the Youth Training Consolidation Act ("Jugendausbildungssicherungsgesetz") and also to the implementation of youth-specific qualifications and employment programmes (Special programme for young people - 2002/2003 and JOBS FOR YOU(TH) '04 and '05 in 2004/2005).

People with disabilities

The Federal Government has formulated the integration of people with disabilities into the employment market as a central objective.

Unemployment for people with disabilities fell in the years 2003 and 2004. The ratio of people with disabilities to the total number of unemployed fell from 12.7% in 2003 to 11.8% in 2004. This is the result of the measures carried out by the Public Employment Service for the benefit of disabled people and of the employment offensive initiated by the Federal Government since 2001 for people with disabilities ("the disability billion": funding of approximately EUR 60 - 70 million per annum for disabled people, in addition to the general budget of the Public Employment Service).

The actions are primarily geared to the primary employment market and to jobs secured under social security legislation. In 2004, measures for 24,300 people were supported by the Federal Social Office ("Bundessozialamt") (of these, 17,500 people within the "disability billion"). Compared with the previous year, an increase of 14% (the disability billion: 24%) could be registered in the case of supported people. The women's share in the total number of measures is 40%. In the course of the year 2004, over 28,000 disabled unemployed people were able to take up a new job as a result.

The continuation of the employment offensive "the disability billion" is also envisaged for 2006.

A particular focus with "the disability billion" was placed on the vocational integration of young people with disabilities and specific measures were developed for this purpose in terms of a tailor-made integration path. Three of these measures are specially highlighted: clearing, individual work assistance in the workplace, integrated vocational training.

The project "clearing" aims to smoothe the complicated placing of adolescent people with disabilities in the employment market with the most appropriate measure in each case, even pre-emptively, in the school/career interface. Clearing Institutions have the task of determining, together with the affected person, the most appropriate tailor-made package of measures for

vocational integration in the last or penultimate school year. A significant success factor is the active inclusion of the youngster, and of his or her parents and teachers. Clearing also has a significant co-ordinating role in the established division of jurisdiction for offers of assistance. Under the leadership of the Federal Social Office, the co-operation partners are the provincial school councils, the Austrian Labour Market Service, class teachers, parents and institutions for disabled people. In 2004, clearing could be offered almost countrywide. A clearing process was successfully concluded with 2,400 young people in 2004 (2003: 1,700). As apprenticeships tailored to their needs, employment relationships measures of the Public Employment Service and further advanced educational training could be provided for many disabled young people with this project. The clearing schemes will continue.

The measure initiated in 2004, "Individual assistance in the workplace", offers people with a severe disability, for whom access to and remaining in working life is impeded despite technical ability, "individual assistance" in the workplace. Assistance takers receive that individual personal support that is necessary to exercise a vocational activity or for the completion of training. Due to the increasing demand, the range of offers through the Federal Social Office will be further expanded in the years 2005 and 2006.

With the "integrated vocational training" established through the 2003 amendment to the Austrian Vocational Training Act ("Berufsausbildungsgesetz"), an incentive was set for people who are disadvantaged in social, vocational or physical respects, for their integration into professional life. In the case of this new training programme, either the apprenticeship will be extended by two years maximum or, if the attainment of an apprenticeship certificate is not possible, a partial qualification will be given, which enables entry into the employment market. By means of customised training with the support of vocational training assistance, the individual needs of disadvantaged young people can be selectively dealt with. There are currently around 1,100 traineeships with the result that this new training programme can already be judged as a success. Teaching establishments in the free economy, which make an integrated vocational training possible for young people, receive a reimbursement of costs for the supporting vocational training assistance from the Federal Social Office.

Migrants

Migrants are often employed in sectors with high unemployment and below average qualification requirements. In addition to the general labour market policy measures, migrants are offered a group-specific package of measures. Examples for this are orientation measures for people with a non-German mother tongue or special training courses for the improvement of access opportunities to higher qualified employment market sectors.

In 2003, 32,000 foreign nationals and 36,900 in 2004 were involved in support measures of the Public Employment Service (11% and 12% respectively of all supported people). In 2005, there were 26,800 foreign nationals (13% of all supported people) up to the end of May.

In 2004, special Public Employment Service grants were provided to approximately 11,000 foreign young people. That corresponds to more than one third of all foreign nationals in various Public Employment Service programmes of measures.

The legal position in the employment market for migrants with a longer period of residence in Austria was considerably improved (see 3.2.6.).

Territorial Employment Pacts (TEPs)

Since 2001, there have been Territorial Employment Pacts ("Territoriale Beschäftigungspakte") in Austria in all federal provinces and partly at the local level. These cooperations are contractually agreed regional partnerships for the linking of the labour market policy with other policy areas in order to contribute to the improvement of the employment situation in the regions. The actors are

various state agencies, the social partners and NGOs. More than one third of the support budget for the active labour market policy is co-ordinated within the framework of TEPs.

An at least indirect effect of the targeted networking of actors in the TEPs is seen in the very small regional variance of the employment rate in an EU comparison. The coefficient of variation for Austria in 2003 amounts to 2.9 and that for the EU average 12.0.

Community initiative EQUAL

The target groups for EQUAL are the groups most confronted with employment market problems for which, in addition to employment and qualification schemes, social care services are often also necessary.

For this reason, EUR 207 million is available in Austria in the period 2000 to 2006. In the first round of applications, 58 development partnerships will be realised. In the second round of applications at the start of 2005, 53 development partnerships have started with the detailed preparation of project ideas in Campaign 1. They will go into implementation in the summer of 2005 (Campaign 2).

Up to the year-end 2003, half the project period for the development partnerships of the first round of applications, a total of 7,500 participants took part in measures. 23% of the people supported by EQUAL are unemployed, 30% in employment, 47% recipients of social assistance or in another status away from the employment market and 11% are either physically or mentally disabled or psychologically ill. Most EQUAL participants of the year 2003 have compulsory school as the highest education completed.

Balance between the protection needs of employees and the flexibility requirements of the economy

In order to be able to better take into account the greater dynamism and more flexibility in the employment market on the one hand and the resulting increased protection needs of employees on the other hand, proposals were mutually prepared by the social partners, which were adopted by the legislator in the form of the Austrian Labour Market Reform Act ("Arbeitsmarktreformgesetz"), which came into effect in 2005.

The terms of "reasonability" (i.e. the conditions of a job that a recipient of unemployment benefit has to accept: "Zumutbarkeitsbestimmung") were reregulated. A binding stipulation was established for a "care plan" to be agreed between the Public Employment Service and clients, which should be produced by mutual agreement, where possible. The care plan must take into account the qualifications usable in the employment market, the maintenance and, when required, the extension of the qualifications.

According to this new act, a job is only reasonable, inter alia, if it is consistent with the observance of statutory care obligations. If no appropriate accommodation is available at the place of work, journey times for the round trip should be taken into consideration. They should not exceed one quarter of the average normal daily working hours (2 hours in the case of full-time employment), one and a half hours in the case of part-time employment of more than 20 hours per week. During the drawing of unemployment benefit, it should be ensured, in the event of a necessary change of career, that the income from the new job represents at least three quarters (four fifths in the first 120 days) of the former remuneration applicable for the unemployment benefit. If the former remuneration is at least half based on part-time employment (with less than three quarters of the normal working hours), the new remuneration must be just as high as a minimum.

Early notification of forthcoming unemployment should help shorten the duration.

Service cheque (“Dienstleistungsscheck”)

It is the objective of the law approved in 2005 to offer a legal and attractive alternative for existing undeclared employment in the area of household-related services and to provide social security protection to employees. If the total of the service cheque paid in exceeds the marginal earnings threshold (EUR 323), a compulsory insurance arises in the health and pension insurance with a contribution rate of 14.2%.

Earning opportunities will be created through the service cheque, particularly for people with impeded access to the employment market (with just a compulsory school-leaving certificate, negligible qualifications, care obligations).

Income from employment

The objective, which was both incorporated in the government programme and also represented by the social partners, to provide for a minimum income from employment of at least EUR 1,000 (14x per annum) for full-time employees in all collective agreements, could be realised for the large part. In the reporting period, appropriate minimum wages were agreed inter alia for the catering trade and for employees in the trade. The minimum wages in the economic categories land and forestry, private households and professional occupations are currently still below EUR 1,000.

In 2002, 83,000 non-seasonal full-time employees (excluding trainees) had income from employment below EUR 14,000 per annum. This figure reduced to 75,000 in 2003. This is 3.7% of all non-seasonal people employed full-time (6.8% of women and 2.1% of men). A further 79,000 people had income between EUR 1,000 and EUR 1,200 (14x per annum) in 2003. Overall, the proportion of non-seasonal full-time employees with an income below EUR 1,200 each month (14x per annum) amounted to 7.6% in 2003 (15% of women and 3.8% of men).

Tax reform 2004/2005

One objective of the tax reform consisted of relieving pressure on recipients with a low income by increasing the tax-free limit.

From 2005, employees pay no wage and income tax up to a gross annual income of EUR 15,780, pensioners up to EUR 13,628 and self-employed people up to an annual income of EUR 10,000. Out of 5.9 million taxable people, this is 2.55 million gainfully employed people and pensioners, who no longer have to pay income or wage tax.

In addition, the income limit for the entitlement to a negative tax was increased from EUR 8,400 per annum to EUR 10,600. For sole earners and the single parents disproportionately at risk-of-poverty, the lone parent and sole earner's tax credit were increased: for the 1st child by EUR 130, the 2nd child by EUR 175 and for each additional child by EUR 220 per annum. These amounts are also paid out as a negative tax. The additional earning opportunity for sole earner families was increased for the partner to EUR 6,000.

3.1.3. Reconciliation of family and work

A better reconciliation of family and work is an essential prerequisite for the alleviation both of female poverty and of family and child poverty. In addition to an appropriate financial protection in the childcare phase, an adequate range of offers in care options for family members, appropriate opportunities in working life (family-friendly working environment) and, in particular, a suitable interlinking of these three areas are essential.

The objectives are to create an appropriate environment for children for growing up, to provide a monetary protection to the families for this situation in life associated with additional expenditure and to structure the working environment in a more family-friendly way.

Monetary benefits for families

In Austria, these benefits assume a great effect in the fight against family poverty. Social security benefits reduce the at-risk-of-poverty rates most markedly particularly with the families at risk. In the case of the families in the lowest income decile, family benefits represent one third of the available income, in the second lowest income decile 22%, while the ratio of family benefits to the available household income amounts to 12% in the Austrian average.

In households with 1 child, social security benefits bring about a reduction in the risk-of-poverty from 22% to 7%, in households with 2 children from 32% to 12%, in households with 3 and more children from 50% to 18% and in households with single parents from 55% to 31%. Nevertheless, the risk-of-poverty for households with single parents and in families with three or more children remains raised, even after taking into account the social security benefits.

The childcare allowance introduced in 2002 (see 4. "Good Practice") directly helps to avoid poverty as well as it facilitates continued employment or the entry into the employment market of parents with infants.

Childcare facilities

Offers of childcare facilities that are satisfactory, tailored to their needs and flexible, are an important prerequisite for the vocational career of parents. Qualitatively superior childcare facilities also make a major contribution to the equality of opportunity for all children in their subsequent educational paths.

According to day-care facilities statistics for 2003, the care ratio for 0 to 2-year-old children amounted to 8.7% (2001: 8.4%, 1995: 4.6%) and for 3 to 5-year-old children 83.9 % (2001: 79%, 1995: 70.6%). 10.4% of 6 to 9-year-old pupils attended after-school care clubs (2001: 8.8%, 1995: 7%). The offer of crèche places has increased by 53% from 1997 to 2003, that for after-school care clubs by 29%.

If the forms of care not recorded in these statistics - such as day parents, child groups, all-day schools etc. - are included, the care ratio of 0 to 2-year-olds was 11% in 2004, 85.2% in the case of 3 to 5-year-olds and 17.5% with the 6 to 9-year-old pupils.

For the provision of nursery school places (children of 3 - 6 years of age), the federal provinces claim to have generally achieved a full provision corresponding to the demand, but at times there is still need for action with the opening times.

It should be noted that the demand for childcare offers for children under 3 years of age is different in the federal provinces due to the established social networks. Whereas, in Vienna, there is a care ratio for children of 0 - 3 years of age of approximately 40%, this is 10% in Upper Austria and roughly corresponds to the need for care ascertained there for this age group.

For children of school age, it is intended to introduce the 5-day-week in schools in general terms and to extend afternoon care. 20,000 additional places for afternoon care are planned on top of the 45,000 places at present. The expanded day care provides that schools have to compulsorily provide information and ascertain the demand. If at least 15 pupils report to a school, a plan must be chosen jointly with the school maintainer. If the school forum or school community committee so wish, classes and care - i.e. an all-day school – may also be offered in alternation. The five-day-week is to be compulsory in future in the compulsory school sector (for 6 to 14-year-olds) as an adjustment to the working environment.

In the provinces - as the responsible regional bodies - rules were enacted, which make it possible, in groups with an extended age range, for both children under 3 years of age and schoolchildren to be looked after. These regulations, which already apply in several federal provinces for the 2005/06 school and nursery school year, make it possible, particularly in rural areas, for the nursery school maintainers to ensure qualitative care for these children, even with low demand. The opening times were extended in the statutory regulations of several federal provinces.

Since 2005, the Austrian Federal Ministry for Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection (BMSG) has supported private providers of innovative facilities with EUR 700,000 per annum from the Family Burdens Equalisation Fund ("Familienlastenausgleichsfonds").

The massive expansion of the range of support services mentioned in 3.2.4. and 3.2.5. for disabled people and people in need of care also promotes a better reconciliation of family and work .

Better employment prospects

The increase in the female participation in employment is traced back primarily to a disproportionate increase in the employment rate for mothers (see 1.2.).

As explained in 4., it is not just an objective with the childcare allowance introduced in 2002 to make a contribution to the financial protection of households with infants, but to extend the paths to work. Assessments show an increase in the gainful employment of mothers during the drawing of the childcare allowance.

The parental part-time work regulation ("Elternteilzeit") introduced in July 2004 constitutes a further measure for the easier reconciliation of family and work. As a result, a legal entitlement to part-time employment (with the right of return to full employment) was established for parents with at least a three-year length of service in businesses with more than 20 employees up to the seventh birthday or a later entry into school of the child. A further increase in gainful employment during the infant stage should be expected through this legal entitlement.

With the introduction of the family hospice leave ("Familienhospizkarenz") in 2002, employees gained the possibility to accompany their seriously ill relatives for up to six months in total. They may reduce their working hours to do this, change the conditions of the working hours or have a period of unpaid leave in their employment. During this period, employees are protected in the health and pension insurance from funds of the unemployment insurance. According to the data of the Central Association of Austrian Social Insurance Institutions, 1,150 people claimed family hospice leave from 1.7.2002 until the end of 2004 (people who have either taken a period of unpaid leave in their employment or reduced their working hours in such a way that their income is under [CD1] a certain amount). People who claim unpaid leave for the purpose of palliative care or the accompaniment of a very seriously ill child can apply for a means tested benefit (family hospice leave handship compensation; "Familienhospizkarenz – Härteausgleich") from the Family Burdens Equalisation Fund EUR 166,000 was paid out in 2004. Accompanying measures for the period of family hospice leave are also provided for in the Austrian Federal Nursing Care Allowance Act ("Bundespflegegeldgesetz").

With the FAMILY & CAREER audit, a qualified management instrument is offered to the business community, with the help of which companies can identify and implement family-friendly measures and benefit from the results. In the meantime, 140 companies have signed an agreement with the Austrian Federal Ministry for Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection for the execution of the audit. 113 companies have already been distinguished with the basic certificate of the FAMILY & CAREER audit. 94 of these still actively participate in the audit process. On average, 30 companies per annum carry out the FAMILY & CAREER audit, i.e. they strategically apply themselves to the implementation of family-friendly and reconciliation-friendly measures.

3.1.4. Monetary social security benefits

Monetary social security benefits are indispensable in order to prevent a drift into social hardship in the case of social and income-related risks. Austrian welfare policy is shaped by the principle that, for the purposes of social cohesion, not only people at risk-of-poverty, but all people should be receivers of social benefits with the occurrence of risks.

The trend of recent years is characterised by the fact that social gaps were filled, the enabling components of benefits were strengthened and consolidating measures were initiated as prerequisites for a sustainable protection of the social protection systems.

Pensions reform 2004

The pensions reform 2004 pursues the objectives of ensuring the funding of public pensions for the next generations as well as reducing the unjustified differences currently existing with the access to pensions and with the assessment of the size of pensions between different occupational groups. The harmonisation of different pension plans and the introduction of an individually defined benefit pension account (“individuelles leistungsorientiertes Pensionskonto”) for all under 50-year-olds was adopted with the pensions reform 2004.

On the one hand, it is the intention of the pensions reform to have a cost-saving impact with regard to the prevailing situation, but on the other hand the reform package contains a number of measures to avoid unacceptable social hardships, to prevent old-age poverty and to offset, to a certain extent, the negative consequences of the gender-specific division of housework and vocational work on the pensions of women.

The maximum loss to the reference pension (2003 legal position) was retroactively reduced in 2004 from 10% to 5%.

In contrast to the situation up to now, the annual pension adjustments will no longer result in real-income losses in future. Annual pension adjustments will cover the movement of prices.

Women will benefit in future from the higher valuation of child-raising periods for the pension. Per child, the first four years after the birth (five years in the case of multiple births) will be credited as eligible periods, which go into the pension calculation with a contribution base of EUR 1,350 each month (corresponds roughly to the current arithmetic mean of women's earnings).

A further step for the extension of independent pension provision for women is taken with the introduction of voluntary pension splitting. The parent who does not attend to the child-raising and is gainfully employed can have up to 50% of his/her partial credit (which is based on his/her gainful employment) transferred to the pension account of the parent who attends to the child-raising.

The attainment of an own pension entitlement (in particular for women) was made considerably easier in that only seven years out of the necessary fifteen insurance years have to be years of gainful employment.

For long-term unemployed people, who have no entitlement to unemployment assistance (“Notstandshilfe”) due to a high income of the spouse, these periods of unemployment have up to now not been credited as fictitious qualifying periods in the pension insurance. In future, these periods of unemployment will also be recognised as eligible periods in the pension insurance without proper drawing of an unemployment assistance.

Individuals with serious work and high health strains during employment (“Schwerarbeiter”) will have lower deductions than other employees, if an earlier move into retirement results.

Raising of the equalisation supplement reference rate (“Ausgleichszulagenrichtsatz”)

Due to a disproportionate raising of the equalisation supplement reference rate (need-based minimum pension for people with a pension entitlement) for couples in 2004 (+5.1%), this is now quite close to the EUROSTAT at-risk-of-poverty threshold. A further disproportionate increase is planned for 2006.

Raising of the value of the long-term care allowance; preferential self-insurance in pension insurance

The long-term care allowance (“Pflegegeld”) was increased by 2% in 2005. This has resulted in additional annual budgetary expenses to the extent of approximately EUR 30 million in the federal government sphere. The increase in the number of long-term care allowance recipients also causes additional annual expenses as a result of the demographic movement. An increase in the social group to the extent of 1 to 2% per annum should be expected in the coming years due to demographic movement.

The maximum age of a disabled person, for whose nursing a member of the household can claim a preferential self-insurance in the pension insurance, was increased to the 40th year of life as from 2005. The costs for this self-insurance will be borne by the Family Burdens Equalisation Fund and add up to approximately EUR 10 million in 2005.

Unemployment insurance

In 2001, a supplementary allowance was introduced for recipients of low unemployment benefit payments. If the level of the unemployment benefit does not reach the level of the equalisation supplement reference rate for single people (threshold value for minimum protection in the pension insurance), the unemployment benefit will be increased by a supplementary amount to the level of this benchmark. In the process, however, the unemployment benefit plus the supplementary amount in the case of single recipients of benefit should not exceed 60% (and in the case of maintenance obligations 80%) of the net remuneration forming the basis of the assessment for the unemployment benefit. This supplementary allowance benefited 44% of the recipients of unemployment benefit (65,000 people) in 2004. EUR 45 million was expended from the funds of unemployment insurance for this purpose. This supplementary allowance amounted to EUR 58 on average per recipient of benefit and per month.

Childcare allowance

The objectives linked to the childcare allowance could be attained. The risk-of-poverty for young parents could be reduced, the reconciliation of family and work improved and also claiming by fathers could be increased (see section 4 "Good Practice" on this subject).

Confinement benefit (“Wochengeld”)

In order to avoid cases of financial hardship in the calculation of the confinement benefit (8 weeks before and 8 or 12 weeks after the birth) in the wake of a recent pregnancy, the childcare allowance will be included in the basis of assessment in future. This means that, in those cases in which there are first of all periods of childcare allowance drawing immediately before commencement of the recent protection period and on top of that a brief return into professional life has taken place, the childcare allowance will be treated as income and has an influence on the 13-week basis of assessment for the confinement benefit. The financial situation of affected women will be considerably improved as a result for this period.

Family allowance

The family allowance was increased for certain target groups in recent years. On the basis of an additional age scale, children have received EUR 7.3 per month more family allowance as from the 3rd completed year of life since 1st January 2003. The transition from the childcare allowance to the next age scale is cushioned with the EUR 130 million that is provided for this purpose annually.

The supplement for the family allowance for severely disabled children was also increased by EUR 7.3 per month as from 1st January 2003. An expenditure of EUR 5 million per annum arises through this for the Family Burdens Equalisation Fund.

An income-related supplement for several children is paid for large families in addition to the family allowance (applies for income below EUR 41,400, 2004); this was increased on 1st January 2002 and currently amounts to EUR 36.4 for the third and each additional child.

Victims of crimes

Since 1.7.2005, victims of crimes and surviving dependents receive an income-related benefit in addition to the compensation for the loss of income or maintenance in accordance with the Crime Victims Assistance Act ("Verbrechensopfergesetz"). This benefit tops up the total income to the equalisation supplement reference rate of the Austrian General Social Insurance Act. So a minimum protection is granted, which prevents victims of crimes from having to finance their livelihood from social assistance funds.

Social assistance

On the basis of the results of the working party "Enhancement of the right to social assistance", a draft was prepared of an agreement under Article 15a of the Austrian Federal Constitution Act (regarding joint measures of the federal government and of the provinces), on behalf of the Austrian Federal Ministry for Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection, for a minimum social protection. This draft is meant to serve as a basis for the ongoing political discussion process with the objective of a harmonised right to social assistance.

In most federal provinces, an increase in applications and in the number of recipients of social assistance benefit payments are recorded due to the increasing unemployment and the strained situation in the low-wage sectors of the employment market. It is manifested particularly strongly in Vienna. In 2004, 75,600 people in Vienna received a social assistance benefit, which represents a considerable increase compared with the previous years.

The provinces have set themselves the objective of improving access to social assistance for all those people who, up to now, have not claimed these benefits at all, or only very late, out of shame or for lack of knowledge. Not least for this reason, Upper Austria, for example, operates extensively in the entire federal province with 65 social advisory offices, which provide a low-threshold range of advisory services and should improve access to social assistance.

The provinces see the need for a reorientation of social assistance from a purely passive monetary benefit towards a service aimed at empowerment. In this connection, incentives for employment were increasingly created in recent years through the allowing of additional earnings.

3.1.5. Health

A high-quality health care system that is equally accessible for everyone benefits lower-income people to a particular extent. In an investigation regarding state of health, health behaviour and utilisation of health services by different income groups (health microcensus and income microcensus, 1999), it was established that the same access opportunities to health services exist in Austria with few exceptions (e.g. dentists) irrespective of income level. Even the journey times to the health facilities and the waiting times in the case of treatments are hardly different.

Health reform 2005

Inadequate overall objectives and plans as well as separate and non-transparent financing systems for the intramural and the extramural sector resulted in an increasing interface problem, a drifting apart of the care sectors of the intramural and extramural area and - associated with these - structural mistakes. Therefore, an agreement was concluded between the federal government and federal provinces for the years 2005 – 2008, in accordance with Article 15a of the Austrian Federal Constitution Act, regarding the organisation and financing of health care, whereby an agreement across all sectors in the planning, management and financing of the entire health care system becomes possible for the first time.

On the basis of these new basic conditions created through the health reform 2005, the care structure should be further optimised in order to ensure care for the population that is as uniform as possible, accessible in the best possible way, but also medically and economically sensible with equal quality throughout Austria. The plan will take into account in particular those care sectors in which gaps in provision still exist (e.g. palliative and hospice care, neurorehabilitation, psychosomatic care across the country).

Preventive health promotion

As the above-mentioned analysis of the health microcensus has revealed, lower-income people live in a less health-conscious way than higher-income groups, which has to do both with different work and living conditions, but also with a different health awareness. It will be the task of the programmes for the promotion of health-conscious lifestyles to address these groups of people in particular to an even greater extent than hitherto. It is planned, through group-specific measures, to increase the utilisation of free preventive care examinations in general terms and with the risk groups in particular.

Expansion of the protection in statutory health insurance

The analysis mentioned in the NAPincl for the non-health-insured people in Austria was completed. Approximately 160 000 people (2% of the population) are not covered in the social health insurance. The figure may contain double counting.

Significant improvements could already be achieved in the reporting period for a proportion of this group of people. Asylum seekers are now also included in the social health insurance. Due to an amendment of the Austrian Unemployment Insurance Act, people are now covered for health insurance after termination of the employment relationship, provided that they fulfil the prerequisites for an entitlement for the drawing of benefits from the unemployment insurance, but a gap exists between the termination of the employment relationship and commencement of the drawing of cash payments from this claim.

Teenager births

The objective of reducing the number and the ratio of teenager births on a continuous basis through assistance and counselling could be achieved. While there were 3,261 births by 15 to 19-

year-old women (0.362% of all 15 to 19-year-old women) in 2000, the number fell to 3,090 (0.349%) in 2003.

3.2. Measures for the benefit of disadvantaged groups

3.2.1. Children and young people

The fight against the risk-of-poverty and the improvement in the development opportunities for children and young people are based on the following pillars in addition to the family policy measures mentioned under 3.2.3.:

- improvement in the development opportunities for disadvantaged young people in education and childcare facilities
- Appropriate basic conditions for the move from the school to the career
- More participation rights for children and young people

The material position of low-income young families in particular was improved in the reporting period through the introduction of the childcare allowance (see 4.). For the first time, therefore, families whose mothers were not gainfully employed before the birth could also claim these cash payments. Under the 2004/2005 tax reform, the sole earner and single parent tax credit amounts were raised by EUR 130 for the first, by EUR 175 for the second and by EUR 220 for each additional child, which are also paid out as a negative tax. This improves, inter alia, the situation of the households of single parents disproportionately at risk-of-poverty.

In sections 3.1.3., 3.2.4. and 3.2.5., a number of measures are listed (improved range of offers for care facilities for children, senior citizens and disabled people, an easier additional earning opportunity through the childcare allowance, legal entitlement to parental part-time employment), which should lend a helping hand to improve the employment prospects for young parents and their vocational careers.

In the section "Education" (3.1.1.), measures are presented for children and young people in the education sector, who require additional measures due to their poorer conditions.

The section "Working life" (3.1.2.) deals with measures that have a smooth transition from the school to professional life as the objective.

Endeavours for the raising of awareness in relation to the roles of the sexes should contribute to it being possible for family and career to be more equitably occupied by both sexes in future and, as a result, gender-specific poverty traps will be reduced.

The provinces report that the families looked after within the framework of child welfare are often exposed at the same time to a multitude of problem situations. Therefore, in addition to monetary support, new forms of monitoring, support, assistance and care must increasingly be offered. The difficulties of parents during a period of prolonged unemployment, with excessive indebtedness or in the event of major living problems can also have repercussions in dealings with the children. As a result, the basic approach of child welfare changes in the form that the primary support for a child at risk must be accompanied by simultaneous assistance for the overall family environment. A section of people, who are in need of assistance but not obviously ready for the acceptance of assistance, is increasingly called on by the federal provinces. In addition, street work, school social work and mobile offer schemes are promoted. In 2004, 16,900 children and young people received benefits under child welfare ("Jugendwohlfahrt") as "support for raising children". In addition, 9,600 minors were looked after, for the purposes of a complete upbringing, by foster parents, in socio-

educational residential communities, homes for children and youths, children's villages and other institutions.

So that separations and divorce do not have an adverse impact for children, the Austrian Federal Ministry for Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection supports non-profit-making associations, which offer therapeutic and educational child groups or even individual work with children as well as couple support, individual support and individual work with parents. Budgetary resources were increased for this.

The Federal Government adopted a "National action plan for the rights of children and young people" in 2004 in accordance with an obligation entered into at the World Summit for Children of the United Nations. The incorporation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child into the constitution is an important requirement of the "NAP for children and young people", which also sets itself the objective of better incorporating children and young people themselves into the development of policy.

The provinces have established their own organisational units with the "Ombudsoffices for Children and Youth". The provinces' ombudsmen for children and youth are involved in relevant legislative projects and participate also in the area of planning and research in the interests of the child's welfare. One of the functions of the federal government's Ombudsoffice for Children and Youth consists of promoting a non-violent upbringing. To do this there is close collaboration with the institutions for public and private child welfare.

3.2.2. Women

Reference is made below, in summary, to actions for the fight against or prevention of poverty, which are particularly effective for the benefit of the respective target groups for women. Gender-specific representations of problem situations or measures and findings relevant to women can be found in the individual sections in this report.

The at-risk-of-poverty rate for women amounts to 14% in 2003 and that for men to 12.3%. Significant causes for this difference are the disproportionate rates of older female pensioners (19%) and of single-parent women (31%). There is the political intent to increase the equalisation supplement reference rate (need based minimum pensions) to the EUROSTAT at-risk-of-poverty thresholds to an even greater extent. The 2004/2005 tax reform provides for specific tax concessions for single parents.

The situation of women regarding education has further improved compared with men in the last 2 years in respect of poverty-related factors. In the case of 15 to 24-year-old women, there is now, for the first time, a lower percentage of women with a compulsory school-leaving certificate as a maximum than with men of the same age. The involvement of women in higher educational careers is greater than that of men. Women also take up further education offers to a marginally greater extent than men (3.1.1.). However, the horizontal gender-specific segmentation in the field of education sector has hardly reduced.

Measures are presented in section 3.1.2., which are aiming at an improvement in the basic conditions for women in the labour market: The conditions of a job that a recipient of an unemployment benefit has to accept were newly regulated (taking into consideration statutory care obligations, allowing for journey times including journey times in the case of part-time employment, introduction of an earnings protection including regulations for part-time employment). The objective of collective minimum wages of at least EUR 1,000 particularly affects women's earnings. The introduction of the entitlement to parental part-time work (see 3.1.3.) may also contribute to an improvement in the quality and job structure of women's part time employment. The labour market policy programmes include explicit and quantifiable gender equality objectives. A general requirement is that 50% of actors in support schemes should be women and also 50% of the

support budget shall be spent for women. The following rank among the current employment policy objectives of the Public Employment Service: to support people with low qualifications conditions (such as the compulsory school-leaving certificate) through qualifications and to facilitate re-entry into the employment market for women after career breaks.

The gender gap in labour force participation has further reduced, which is accompanied by increasing part-time employment. Unemployment and also long-term unemployment are increasing with women to a greater extent than with men (3.1.2.). The gender pay gap has become smaller if the gross hourly earnings are taken as a basis. The average gross hourly earnings of women were 20% lower than those of men in 2000 and this difference amounted to 18% in 2004.

In the social security benefits section (see 3.1.4.), gender-related considerations and measures of the 2004 pensions reform are presented, amongst others. An important regulation for many women was adopted in the area of unemployment assistance (unemployment assistance is a benefit for long term unemployed persons): Even if no benefit is paid out due to offsetting of the partner's income, the corresponding periods of unemployment are acknowledged as periods of contribution payments in the pension insurance.

The reforms undertaken in the area of social protection disproportionately benefit women, as far as improvements in the minimum social security benefits (pension insurance, unemployment insurance) and the greater credits for labour market absences due to childcare in the pension calculation are concerned. The extension of the calculation periods in the pension calculation will have a greater benefit-reducing impact on women's pensions due to the part-time employment pursued by them to an increased extent and due to comparatively longer career breaks.

The positive developments described in 3.1.3., 3.2.4. and 3.2.5. with care facilities release women from tasks that they have to look after to a much greater extent than men and, as a result, give them more opportunities in working life.

The fight against poverty constitutes a central element in the context of grants for women's projects of the Federal Ministry of Health and Women. 38 service points for women as the initial contact points for counselling and psychological care for women at risk-of-poverty, hardship and transition living quarters and projects for migrant women are supported, amongst other things.

The implementation of gender mainstreaming was further formalised with the resolution of the Council of Ministers dated 9.3.2003 (inter alia, gender budgeting). In most policy areas, there is an explicit requirement to apply the criteria for gender mainstreaming. In most support programmes, objectives are formulated on the minimum extent to which women should be receivers of these programmes.

3.2.3. Families

The fight against family poverty is based on the following pillars:

- allowing of an appropriate household income resulting from a better reconciliation of family and work
- adequate range of offers for monetary family benefits
- specific consideration of family-related expenditure in taxation law
- assistance in family crisis situations

In section 3.1.3., the measures for an improvement in the reconciliation of family and work are described.

Section 3.1.4. deals with monetary family benefits. The "Advance on Maintenance Payments Act" ("Unterhaltsvorschussgesetz") should also be mentioned in this context. A state advance payment on maintenance to single parents for the children will be granted, when the maintenance debtor does not fulfil his maintenance obligations. In 2003, 41,200 single parents were granted an advance from the Austrian State of EUR 93 million and in 2004 42,800 single parents of EUR 98 million in total. The high volume of the advance indicates the importance of this poverty-preventing measure, particularly as the repayment quota of the maintenance debtors, at EUR 42 million (2004), does not even represent half of the advances.

Violence in the family/couple relationship is the most common form of violence against women. For the securing of temporary residential accommodation for women threatened by violence and their children, further women's refuges or crisis places have been established in the federal provinces. In some provinces, a legal entitlement of every maltreated woman and her children to a protected place of residence was guaranteed by statutory measures. The financing of accommodation in women's refuges and crisis housing is provided by fixed benefit payments.

The amendment to the Austrian Enforcement Act 2003 ("Exekutionsordnungsnovelle") results in an improvement in the protection against domestic violence.

The "Platform against violence in the family" has now conducted regional prevention projects all over Austria for over 10 years. The platform is an Austria-wide network, in which 31 counselling institutions collaborate from the areas of violence against children, violence against women, violence to/among young people, violence against older people and gender-specific work for boys and men. The work of the platform starts in the preliminary stages of violence, i.e. in the area of primary prevention. The objectives of the platform are the reduction of violence, the raising of the detection rate and an optimisation of interventions in instances of violence.

In the 330 family counselling offices supported by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection, free counselling is increasingly offered in the event of violence in the family. The Austrian Federal Ministry for Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection also supports child protection centres and women's counselling offices. In addition, parental education is promoted as prevention against violence to the child.

In order to offer support to victims of family violence in judicial proceedings as well, training sessions for psychosocial and legal companions to proceedings and the creation of regional co-operation organisations and interdisciplinary seminars and supervision seminars have been financed since 2000.

The work with victims of family violence brought the knowledge that a long-term protection for victims is only possible, if work is done also with the perpetrators of violence. Only in such a way can repeat offences be prevented. Assessments show lower second offence rates with perpetrators, who have participated in programmes of work with perpetrators. This work with perpetrators is carried out in institutions for the counselling and treatment of men on a voluntary basis or by allocation of the court.

3.2.4. People with disabilities

For disabled people capable of work, supportive qualifications and employment measures are important in order to facilitate an integration into the primary employment market in particular (see section 3.1.2.). For severely impaired people with only very little or no ability to work and for the relief of family members, it is the objective to provide adequately serviced types of housing and semi institutional services with suitable activities for the people affected.

Semi institutional services, home and residential places

For people with mental and multiple disabilities, for whom vocational involvement is not at all or barely feasible, 13,600 places were available in semi institutional services at the end of 2002. That was approximately one third more places than in the middle of the nineties. In addition, there were 8,400 places in serviced residential accommodation (fully-serviced and partially-serviced residences) at the end of 2002. The range of offers in such residential places has increased by 70% since the middle of the nineties.

In their development plans, the federal provinces provide for a further expansion of residential accommodation and semi institutional services, taking into account the normalisation and integration principle. Through the creation of more residential places and semi institutional services that are small, regional and differentiated in care intensity, the option in respect of location and range of support services should be improved in the coming years.

Support services for people with a psychosocial need for care and addicts

The measures in this category listed in the NAPincl 2003 - 2005 on the part of the provinces have already been implemented in broad areas. The choices range from counselling, crisis telephones, work integration schemes, provision of residential facilities with graduated care intensity through to the setting up of day centres. One specific addressee for the measures is people with multiple diagnoses.

Psychiatry plans, which form the basis for the decentralisation of acute psychiatry and for the expansion of extramural facilities and services, were enhanced in the provinces. In some provinces, these plans are being updated at present and implemented at the regional level.

The federal provinces are implementing drug plans in 2003 - 2005, in which the graduated measures from primary prevention through to social reintegration are also included, as are technical standards and the safeguarding of adequate provision taking into account regional requirements. Additional treatment centres and residential rehabilitation places were established, the supply of street work set up and expanded and counselling institutions quantitatively and qualitatively extended (increased outpatient counselling).

Disability Equality Act

The Disability Equality Act ("Behindertengleichstellungsgesetz"), which will come into force on 1.1.2006, is aimed at an elimination of discrimination in all areas of life. Equal chances should be made possible in society for people with disabilities. The law contains a discrimination ban and, as a penalty, the possibility of a legal action for damages - either in the form of an individual action or as a class action of the "Austrian Working Party for Rehabilitation" (the umbrella organisation for disabled people). However, before legal action, a conciliation procedure has to be conducted with the Federal Social Office, in which professional mediation is also offered.

A protection against discrimination for the working environment will be introduced and the EU directive for equal treatment in employment and occupation will be implemented for people with disabilities as well. A disability ombudsman for disabled people is provided at the Austrian Federal Ministry for Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection, who is meant to advise and support affected people.

Sign language is formally recognised under constitutional law for the sake of people with a hearing-disability.

3.2.5. People in need of long term care

Depending on the definition, between 350,000 and 500,000 people in Austria are reliant on third-party assistance and care with the necessary daily routines. Since 1993, these people have had an entitlement to cash payments adjusted according to the extent of the need for nursing. These cash payments are supposed to cover a proportion of the nursing-related additional expenses, but they also bring about a reduction in the risk-of-poverty. Whereas, according to SILC 2003, 16% of the people over 65 years of age have an income lower than the EUROSTAT at-risk-of-income-poverty threshold value, this is the case with 13% of the long-term care allowance recipients.

The level of the cash payment allows a freedom of choice with regard to the claiming of the necessary support. In view of the considerable expansion described below in the range of support services for people in need of care, the freedom of choice with regard to the kind of assistance can be realised to an ever-greater extent.

Range of choice in mobile and institutional services

On the basis of the agreement under Article 15a of the Austrian Federal Constitution Act between the federal government and the provinces for the provision of long term care development plans for the expansion of care facilities were prepared in the federal provinces in the middle of the 90s with defined goals and objectives until 2010. These plans are the basis for the expansion of choices in the context of the provision of long term care.

The study commissioned by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection, "Expansion of services and facilities for people in need of care in Austria - Interim report 2003"², examined the measures taken so far for the implementation of the development plans of the federal provinces. It describes the care situation of people in need of care in Austria (position at: year end 2002).

The care situation and the starting situation were different in the federal provinces at the time of the preparation of the demand and development plans. The following presentation refers to figures for the whole of Austria.

In the case of mobile services, 7,800 care staff (converted to the full-time equivalent) were employed at the end of 2002. That corresponds to a personnel gain of 50% within approximately 5 years. Another additional personnel gain of approximately 2,000 care staff is planned up to the end of the planning period (until 2010).

In the case of senior citizens' ("Altenheime") and nursing homes ("Pflegeheime"), there were 67,600 home places at the end of 2002 and thus a gain of 2,800 places (+ 4%) since the actual position in 1995/1996/1997. As a result, Austria boasts a high care density (116 home places for 1,000 people at the age of 75 years and older). The ratio of nursing places to residential places amounted to 78 to 22. Overall, a massive reduction in residential places should be noted in favour of an expansion in nursing places. Approximately 400 places were lacking at the end of 2002 for the target position specified in the development plans for home places for 2010.

29,000 people are employed in mobile services and in senior citizens' and nursing homes (estimated in the full-time equivalent). The trend of recent years was marked in both sectors both by an increase in personnel and by an upgrading of skills. The proportion of certified nursing staff and of specialist staff has increased and the proportion of ancillary staff has fallen. The plan - to raise the quality of care and to match the requirements for intensive care in the context of the

² The findings of the study commissioned by the Federal Ministry for Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection, "Expansion of services and facilities for people in need of care in Austria – Interim report 2003" are reproduced in sections 3.2.4. and 3.2.5. The figures in these sub-sections do not match with the figures published in the NAPIncl 2003-2005 due to modified data collection methods.

increase in elderly people - was thus implemented. The supply of short-term care has increased and a further expansion is envisaged in the coming years.

In the case of semi institutional services (measures giving structure to the day for elderly people), a total of 1,070 places were offered at the end of 2002 (particularly in geriatric day centres). This important form of offer for elderly people is still rare outside Vienna, as it is rather dependent on urban structures because of the required geographical accessibility.

Quality standards

An important role is accorded to quality in the area of the provision of caring. The project "Quality standards in domestic care" was carried out on behalf of the Austrian Federal Ministry for Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection in 2003. In the process, home visits were conducted by certified nursing staff with 2,000 long-term care allowance recipients of levels 3 to 7. The results of the project show a good standard of nursing for people who are cared for in the domestic sphere. However, it was also identified that a need is often produced for additional information and advice. For this reason, the home visits by certified nursing staff have now been implemented as an ongoing measure. There is also an associated supervision aspect, whereby appropriate measures can be taken in the event of inadequate care (e.g. neglect) for the person in need of care.

Reform of training programmes in the long term care and disability sector

The social professions are to be upgraded and mobility in the employment market increased. This should deliver significant quality improvements both for the occupational groups concerned and for the people looked after. A working party for the training programmes and job descriptions in the long term care and disability sector has developed a plan for social occupations in three years of work, which inter alia complies with the following principles:

The training programmes and job descriptions will be provided in a standard manner throughout Austria in future. The framework of the social occupations is to be transparent in the horizontal and vertical direction. The training programmes are reciprocally recognised by all federal provinces. The majority of social occupations simultaneously gain the auxiliary nursing qualifications in accordance with the Austrian Health Care and Nursing Care Act ("Gesundheits- und Krankenpflegegesetz"). The remaining social occupations are entitled to carry out supportive activities after completion of an appropriate training module.

The agreement in accordance with Article 15a of the Austrian Federal Constitution Act was signed at the end of 2004 by the Federal Minister of Social Affairs and the heads of the provincial governments. It is to come into force as soon as it has been ratified by the federal government and at least five provinces in accordance with the constitution and must then be incorporated in statutory provisions within two years.

Against the background of a growing need for qualified workers in the sphere of health and nursing occupations, the Public Employment Service is setting up an appropriate programme, which promotes the training of unemployed people on the one hand and, on the other hand, targets the upgrading of skills for people already employed. Since the year 2002, around 5,400 individuals (of these approximately 83% women, position in the middle of June 2005) have been processed under appropriate Public Employment Service courses for unemployed people. In addition, a special development programme for the upgrading of skills in tandem with work was developed for auxiliary personnel already employed in this sector, which has been used since the year 2003 and in the framework of which 870 people have already been supported so far (of these approximately 98% women; position at: June 2005).

Protection provisions for people in institutional services

The Austrian Home Contract Act (“Heimvertragsgesetz”) came into effect in 2004. It relates to all old people's homes and nursing homes, in which the residents are looked after and nursed on the basis of contracts under civil law. This affects around 800 facilities with approximately 70,000 residents. It is the objective of this Act to improve the legal and economic position of the home residents as consumers. That is to be accomplished, inter alia, through a standard minimum content for home contracts, through provisions for a price reduction in the event of deficiencies, through provisions regarding the legal fate of deposits and through termination restrictions. They are provisions under civil law and consumer rights by nature. As a result, they may be invoked not only by the individual resident and his/her relatives, but also by consumer organisations within the framework of collective legal protection.

The Austrian Stay at Care Institutions Act (“Heimaufenthaltsgesetz”) came into effect in 2005. It covers the above-mentioned old people's homes and nursing homes and in addition approximately 500 institutions for disabled people. It has significance for more than 100,000 residents of institutional services. The objective of the Act is the regulation and monitoring of restrictions of liberty in senior citizens' and nursing homes and comparable institutions for the care of disabled people. The conditions, under which the residents of such institutions may be restricted in their personal freedom, are precisely regulated. The "residents' representative" is someone placed alongside them, who has to look after their interests with the home operator and possibly also with respect to the Court. These restrictions of liberty are to be checked by the courts on application.

Intensive preparations are in progress in the provinces for the coming into effect of these two Acts, particularly in respect of the information of the home operators and the training of employees.

“Patient and nursing lawyers” (“Patienten- und Pflegetherapeuten”) have been provided in several federal provinces, who act as an independent contact point for complaints and suggestions.

3.2.6. Migrants

The policy on foreigners in Austria is guided by the principle "Integration for already established persons". There are, on the one hand, targeted integration measures for foreign nationals, who have already stayed longer in Austria and, on the other hand, there is the endeavour to protect the already strained employment market against a new influx. For this reason, a drop in jobs requiring a permit has been recorded since 2000 (242,000 in 2000, 221,000 in 2004). The general employment of foreigners (including the foreign nationals not subject to the Act Governing Employment of Foreign Nationals (“Ausländerbeschäftigungsgesetz”)) has increased from 320,000 in 2000 to 362,000 in 2004.

Although the participation opportunities of migrants are still considerably below the average, improvements are to be noted in the education sector (3.2.1.) and in the legal position in the employment market.

Above all, the Austrian Aliens Act (“Fremdengesetz”), which came into effect in 2003, and the integration degree of the Federal Ministry of Economics and Labour from the year 2000 have contributed to foreign fellow citizens with a longer period of residence in Austria being able to achieve a considerably better legal position in the employment market. In 2003, the “Proof of residence” (“Niederlassungsnachweis”) was introduced by the Austrian Aliens Act, which brings to effect a harmonisation of residence and employment. The document of residence entitles foreign nationals to hold a job throughout Austria and no separate employment permit is necessary for the foreign nationals. The document of residence should be issued to foreign nationals (and to their spouses and children) if, for example, they are permanently resident in the federal territory for 5 years and have a regular income. In 2004, a quarter of employed foreign nationals requiring a

permit had an document of residence. In addition, the legal status of foreign nationals in the employment market has generally improved. While 38% of employed foreign nationals requiring a permit (39% of women and 36% of men) were gainfully employed with an exemption certificate ("Befreiungsschein") in 1995, the ratio of holders of an exemption certificate or of an document of residence to employed foreign nationals requiring a permit increased to 80% in 2004 (80% in each case with women and men).

Foreign citizens who have had their main residence in Austria for 10 years without interruption may obtain Austrian citizenship. Use has been increasingly made of this option in recent years. In 2000, there were 24,600 naturalisations, 31,700 in 2001, 36,000 in 2002, 45,100 in 2003 and 42,200 in 2004.

The barriers for a successful integration by migrants are a lack of knowledge of languages but also cultural barriers. Therefore, on the basis of the 2002 amendment to the Austrian Aliens Act, individual integration agreements are reached with certain groups of migrants for the improvement of the knowledge of languages. In the years 2003 and 2004, a total of 3,500 people have successfully completed a language learning scheme to level A1 of the Common European Framework of Reference.

The 2005 package of rights for foreigners ("Fremdenrechtspaket"), which inter alia provides for an enhancement of the integration agreement, is currently in passage through parliament. The new law provides for firstly an enlargement of the target group, secondly an increase in the language level to the A2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and thirdly, as an additional range of offers, literacy courses and a module on knowledge of the country.

Several EU directives, which provide for additional integration measures for foreign nationals, will also be implemented within the framework of the 2005 package of rights for foreigners. Thus, for example, family members will gain access to a job in future, even after one year of residence, to the same extent as the principal carer, whom they followed after. Furthermore, foreign nationals can in future also go to another EU member state looking for a job after a five-year residence with the recently created residence permit "EC long-term residence".

The federal provinces are drawing up their own integration models (e.g. Upper Austria) for the integration of migrants. Thus, in a participative work approach between government and non-governmental organisations, it should be clarified, which objectives and priorities will be set with regard to the integration of migrants and what measures are necessary and sensible for the achievement of objectives.

The federal provinces in some cases operate specific integration offices or have integration agents, who have the networking and co-ordination of migration agendas as the objective. In Vienna, the municipal administration is supported there within the framework of a competence centre in offering services to all citizens of the city personally and professionally. The necessary cross-cultural sensitivity and capability will be developed further. At the same time, the agendas of the dissolved Vienna Integration Fund were incorporated into a municipal authority department.

3.2.7. Asylum seekers

A total of 32,400 asylum applications were made in 2003 and 24,600 in 2004. 2,100 asylum applications were positively determined in 2003 and 5,200 in 2004. In the months January to March 2005, 4,200 asylum applications were made (990 positively determined).

Due to the relatively high application figures in recent years in conjunction with sometimes comparatively long durations for proceedings in all courts, many asylum seekers in Austria are in an uncertain position over several years in some cases and generally remain practically excluded from the employment market. As a result, some of these people were reliant on assistance through

the federal government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or private individuals or were even without means in certain cases. This is the opportunity to carry out a comprehensive reform of the asylum law. The statutory provisions concerned are in the review process.

The provision of asylum seekers with accommodation, food and medical care was implemented in 2004 with the "Basic Welfare Support Agreement between the federal government and the provincial governments for aliens in need of assistance and protection". After the acceptance and execution of the admission procedure, the asylum seekers are supported by the federal provinces in accordance with an apportionment ratio, which matches the pertinent share of the population. Therefore, it is now guaranteed that all asylum seekers in need of assistance are given the basic welfare support. The financial burden is borne 60% by the federal government and 40% by the provinces. In April 2005, 27,800 people were in basic provision.

For implementation, the provinces have recourse to non-governmental organisations, with which there are appropriate agreements. For the monitoring and securing of the standard of quality in the refugee accommodation, a points rating system was introduced in the provinces for the calculation of the daily rate, which has brought with it an increase in the standard in the accommodation for asylum seekers and foreigners. The provinces are also endeavouring in many cases to switch the present full board to self-catering, primarily for the strengthening of the self-support capability. At the same time, the accommodating of refugees in smaller, manageable units that are integrated into the community is an objective of the provinces.

A draft of the Austrian Federal Care Act 2005 ("Bundesbetreuungsgesetz") provides for the possibility that asylum seekers also remain in federal care temporarily, after admission to the actual proceedings was effected, as long as the accommodation location in the federal provinces has not been determined. In this regard, a final gap in the law with regard to care is now closed.

In the context of the 2005 package of rights for foreigners ("Fremdenrechtspaket") the exemption of acknowledged convention refugees from the purview of the Act Governing Employment of Foreign Nationals ("Ausländerbeschäftigungsgesetz") was also extended to foreigners who have had the subsidiary protection status for one year. This status is accorded inter alia to foreigners whose asylum application was finally and conclusively rejected and whose refoulement to their country of origin would infringe Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), Article 3 ECHR or Protocol No.6 and No.13 to the Convention or would bring with it, for them as civilians, a serious threat to life or health by reason of indiscriminate violence in situations of international or national conflict.

In 3 development partnerships within the scope of EQUAL, asylum seekers with a provisional residence entitlement, people with a temporary residence permit, people with humanitarian residence permits, people with a temporary residence entitlement and foreign nationals, to whom a deportation deferment was granted, are the main addressees. The development partnerships provide qualifications and psychological care. Counselling, language learning and employment market guidance are other parts of these projects.

3.2.8. Overindebted people

According to current estimates of the debtor advice services ("Schuldnerberatungsstellen"), around 9% of households (approximately 300,000 households) are overindebted. There are studies planned on behalf of the Austrian Federal Ministry for Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection, which should quantitatively specify the extent and the trend of overindebtedness in Austria and ascertain the consequences on the circumstances of the households affected by this.

The care density through the publicly acknowledged debtor advisory services amounts to between 0.83 and 1.63 counsellors to 100,000 inhabitants in the federal provinces with a reference date of 1.1.2005. This results from a total of 97 full-time counsellors (+2 compared with 2002) at 28 debt

advisory services. According to debt advisory services, bottlenecks are experienced with the counselling, particularly in Vienna and Tyrol. The number of initial consultations has risen by 14% (from 11,200 to 12,700) from 2002 to 2004. The funds made available to the debt advisory services were increased by 5% from 2002 to 2004.

In the provinces, a further extension of measures for overindebted people is taken as a basis. Importance is increasingly attached to preventive measures (education, raising of awareness, etc.), in addition to counselling and monitoring.

The equivalent of 5.5 people (à 40 hours) are currently occupied full-time with prevention in five debt advisory centres. In 2003, there were 4.4 people. Some federal provinces are implementing preventative measures in the form of campaigns (e.g. the mobile phone campaign in Upper Austria) in collaboration with the debt advisory services. A mobile phone brochure initiated by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection for young people, "By all that is right and fair", was prepared with the textual assistance of Austria's debt advisory services.

The Austrian Federal Ministry for Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection commissioned two studies in 2004 with the umbrella organisation of the debt advisory services, which deal with the debt settlement procedure - "10 years of private bankruptcy" - and the "Market" for counselling and support facilities for indebted and overindebted people in Austria.

3.2.9. Homeless people

Plans for the prevention of eviction were drawn up in the provinces by linking with the non governmental support organisations for aid for homeless people. In Upper Austria, it is planned to put prevention of eviction and safeguarding of residential accommodation on a statutory basis. A measure increasingly utilised for the prevention of eviction is the short-term payment of rent arrears from social assistance funds. In the provinces in which prevention of eviction is already extensively and systematically pursued (Vienna), the dwellings of 53% of the people threatened by evictions could be secured through the Centre for Secure Tenancy ("Fachstelle für Wohnungssicherung") in 2004. Only 16% have lost their abode in Vienna in 2004 in spite of intervention and advice. No outcome was yet established for 29%. It can be stated that a further increase in homelessness was averted with the introduction of the prevention of eviction. In addition to these preventative measures for the safeguarding of residential accommodation, the provinces are establishing residential accommodation for evicted and homeless people. In Vienna, 2,300 dwellings were allocated to evicted and homeless people in 2003 and 2,100 in 2004.

Apart from Vienna with urban conditions, the quantitative and qualitative support measures for people who are homeless or threatened by homelessness will be expanded in the other federal provinces as well. Salzburg and Lower Austria report on the creation of specific (long-term) residential facilities for homeless women and Upper Austria will effect improvements in choice in the context of acute aid (emergency sleeping centre) and of serviced residential choices.

3.2.10. Delinquent persons

In addition to the general preventative functions and the guarantee of a secure community, it is an important objective of the Austrian criminal politics with regard to poverty aversion to facilitate integration into society for delinquent people by means of rehabilitating measures.

In order to reduce the number of judicial convictions, "diversion measures" were introduced in 2000 (payment of an amount of money, an out-of-court offender-victim mediation, services in the public interest, period of probation combined with assistance by probation service and complying with

duties). In the case of diversion measures, the compensation for damage and the material and emotive recompense of the victims of a criminal offence are the primary objective for the purposes of "restorative justice", in addition to the restoration of law and order. More than 40,000 successful diversion options could be put to defendants per annum since 2000. As a result, the number of convictions, with all their socially negative and disintegrative consequences, could be reduced by 37 per cent compared with 1999. Overall, the number of convicted people in Austria (in relation to 1000 people of a criminally responsible age) for the year 2003, at 6.1, is the third-lowest since 1947.

The ratio of conditional releases to all releases from prison amounted to 14% in 2003. The ratio varies considerably in the regions.

1,400 people per annum have to go to prison because they do not pay their fine and therefore have to serve a sentence of imprisonment in default of payment of a fine. Here, the Federal Ministry of Justice and NEUSTART (probation service) developed a pilot project for this group of people, so that fines may also be compensated by services in the public interest and not by imprisonment.

Approximately 8,400 clients per annum are taken care of through NEUSTART, primarily after conditional convictions due to a judicial ruling (admission of approximately 2,900 clients per annum). The objective of the probation service is social integration, avoidance of recidivism and thus prevention.

Released prisoners are voluntarily counselled and looked after through the "Assistance service for released prisoners". 5,700 clients were voluntarily counselled and looked after in 2004 by the institutions of NEUSTART in residential, financial, employment-related and psychosocial matters. There is very close co-operation with the Public Employment Service on the basis of subsidy agreements for the reintegration of this group of people with specific placement impediments into the employment market.

For the penal system, "telelearning" (Telfi) was offered for 230 inmates in the context of the EQUAL project. 83% of them have passed the examinations taken (position at: end of 2004). Only 8% have prematurely aborted the courses of their own accord or had to abort them for disciplinary reasons. Experiences from the Telfi project have shown that people with basic fundamental deficiencies could hardly be reached because they have major reservations on the subject of learning in general terms and on the new technologies especially. In the follow-up project organised by NEUSTART, "Step by step" (also promoted within the scope of EQUAL), it is now being attempted to offer special entry facilities. On this subject, the range of offers for qualifications and support measures and low-threshold aptitude test schemes will be expanded. In addition to the advancement of psychosocial capabilities, support will be offered in regional networks in the period from 6 months before until 6 months after release. Geographically, "Step by step" is focused on the conurbations of Vienna, Linz, Graz and Klagenfurt.

3.3. Involvement of the actors

A multitude of actors are engaged in the area of the fight against poverty in Austria. This is caused by the federal structure of Austria, the traditionally strong involvement of the social partners in planning and implementation in the context of the employment and social policy and by the increasing role of other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as providers of social services and as the mouthpieces and lobbyists for sections of the population at risk-of-poverty.

The drafting of the previous two NAPincl is based on consultations with all these actors.

The requirements for the presentation of the NAPincl and the required multi-dimensional approach have brought about that the cooperation of those responsible on the political and government level

was intensified within the federal government and between the federal government and provinces. However, significant content-related differences of opinion between the positions of the Federal Government and the provinces on the one hand and some social partners and NGOs on the other hand were a limiting factor to a greater integration of the ideas of these actors into the NAPincl.

In a variety of policy areas, which are referred to in the NAPincl, the social partners and the NGOs are involved both in the planning and in the implementation. This relates to the employment policy in particular. The social partners are represented in the administrative body of the Public Employment Service. They are key actors (with other NGOs) in the implementation of Territorial Employment Pacts and they are initiators of projects for disabled employees, older people in the employment market, for better vocational and training opportunities for young people and for health-promoting measures in the working environment. In their role as negotiators of collective agreements - which affect more than 90% of employees in the private-enterprise sector - the social partners contribute to a fair balance of interests being achieved with the wages and working conditions. Minimum wages of EUR 1,000 each month, 14x per annum, and minimum wages in excess of that are incorporated in most collective agreements (see also 3.2.2. on this subject).

The Austrian Labour Market Reform Act described in this NAP-implementation report, which attempts to bring the requirements of a flexible employment market into line with the protection needs of unemployed people, is the consensual result of negotiations between the social partners.

In addition to the involvement in governmental policy areas and the joint activities at the collective wage agreement level and sectors of the employment market, the social partners offer services for their members in their own fields of activity, which befits a poverty-fighting role (statements on this subject and the assessment of the NAPs from the view of the social partners should be gathered from the opinions of the social partners enclosed as an Appendix).

The state administration at the federal government and at the provincial level provides for formal consultation bodies in a variety of policy fields, not just for social partners, but for other interest groups and NGOs. There are, inter alia, advisory councils for the agendas of senior citizens, disabled people, families, children or asylum seekers.

Provincial law provisions include the compulsory involvement of specific actors defined by statute at the national and at the regional level. Apart from this formal involvement of actors (e.g. in advisory councils), there is cooperation with the "Träger der Freien Wohlfahrt" (non governmental organisations) by the provinces in many planning measures (e.g. in the preparation of development plans). A greatest possible networking between the intramural and the extramural sectors is targeted and in some cases formally secured through a separate health and welfare fund.

At the micro level, integrated health and social districts are being implemented as a co-operation instrument at the district and municipality level, which provide a platform for co-operation to all actors. The provinces co-operate with umbrella organisations, working parties and self-help organisations.

In the "family and child-friendly community audit" ("Auditfamilien- und kinderfreundliche Gemeinde") developed by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection, the supporting project advisory group consists of representatives of the federal government, countries and municipalities, NGOs and research. It is a key objective to involve the municipality residents. All Austria's municipalities have been able to conduct this audit since summer 2004. The topic of social exclusion is a fundamental focal point.

The federal government and provinces pay subsidies to NGOs and umbrella organisations of NGOs.

The federal government and provinces finance ombudsoffices for children and young people for the enforcement of children's rights and protection of the interests of pertinent target groups.

The Austrian Home Contract Act and the Austrian Stay at Care Institutions Act (see 3.2.5.) approved in the reporting period are striving for an improvement in the legal position of home residents. Apart from the residents and relatives, certain NGOs will also be able to represent the interests of home residents within the framework of the collective legal protection. Furthermore, "residents' representatives" will be established, who are supposed to lend a helping hand to better enforce the interests of residents against the home operators or even the Court.

In order to systematically describe the various activities of NGOs in the area of the fight against poverty and in order to also develop and to improve the forms of co-operation between NGOs and public agencies, an appropriate study was allocated to the umbrella organisations of the NGOs in the social sector. The findings will be available in the autumn of 2006.

4. Good Practice: Childcare Allowance

The biggest family reform of recent years was implemented in Austria by the introduction of the childcare allowance in 2002, which replaced the parental leave benefit applying up to then.

Objectives

- Public recognition of the care service provided by parents, improvement in the material position of young parents
- Better reconciliation of family and work
- Freedom of choice for the parents
- Incentives for a fair division of childcare between both parents

Improvement in the material position of young parents

Through the childcare allowance amounting to EUR 436 each month, the care service of parents is acknowledged and to a significant part reimbursed.

Through the uncoupling of the entitlement to childcare allowance from a gainful employment of the parents pursued before the birth, there was a widening of the circle of recipients, from which primarily housewives or househusbands, students, pupils, part-time employees, free employees, (new) self-employed people and farmers benefit. A section of this social group especially is often furnished with low financial resources. Compared with the parental leave benefit at that time (2000: 75,000 people), more than twice as many parents now draw the childcare allowance (March 2005: 168,000 people).

Parental couples or single parents and sole earners, if they only have a small income, receive a supplement to the childcare allowance as a refundable transitional benefit amounting to EUR 181 each month. The income limit for the supplement was increased to EUR 5,200 for the drawing parent in 2004, EUR 7,200 applies for the 2nd parent and EUR 3,600 for each additional person liable to provide maintenance.

The supporting assessment by the Austrian Institute for Family Studies shows that the childcare allowance provides a significant contribution to securing the livelihood of families with low family income. This is primarily attributable to the fact that a proportion of these people got no comparable cash payment before, as they were not gainfully employed before the birth of the child. If one determines the equalisation supplement reference rate of the pension insurance to be a criterion for poverty, the household income of 11% of families originally at risk-of-poverty, with the youngest child between 0 and 18 months, and of 21% of families, with the youngest child in the age range between 19 and 30 months, is increased above this threshold value of the equalisation supplement reference rate through the childcare allowance.

Better reconciliation of family and work

During the drawing of childcare benefit, up to EUR 14,600 may be earned in the calendar year at the same time. Only the income of that parent who draws the childcare benefit is taken into account.

The additional earning opportunity has increased the labour force participation of mothers with infants. In an assessment of the Federal Ministry of Economics and Labour based on register data of the Public Employment Service and of the Central Association of Social Insurance Institutions ("Karenzmonitoring"), how the new additional earning opportunity was used was examined for the term 2000 – 2004. According to this assessment, the proportion of recipients of childcare allow-

ance employed in marginal part-time jobs fell, while the number of those who were part-time employed above the marginal earnings threshold has risen from 13% in 2000 to 49% in the first half-year of 2004.

Improvement in the freedom of choice

The level of the childcare allowance, the possibility to be able at the same time to earn up to a certain limit without benefit reductions, the expansion of care facilities for children and for people who are disabled and in need of care and the family-friendly measures effected in working life (see sections 3.1.2., 3.1.3., 3.2.4., 3.2.5.) create better basic conditions for the decision of parents regarding the form the care of infants should take.

Increase in the care ratio of fathers

Through the additional earning opportunity of up to EUR 14,600 per annum and in view of the extension of the drawing of benefit by half a year to a total of three years – if the second parent also devotes him/herself to the childcare – an incentive is established for the fathers to increasingly participate in the care of children. The group of recipient fathers has increased since the year 2000 (old parental leave regulation) from 1,400 to 5,300 in March 2005.