

National Reform Programme 2020

Austria

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1 Introduction

In the framework of economic coordination, each EU Member State has to convey a National Reform Programme and a stability or convergence programme to the European Commission by the end of April at the latest. These documents provide information on the medium-term budgetary planning and on the implementation of the country-specific recommendations as well as on progress relating to the national Europe 2020 targets. Both documents were subjected to an in-depth assessment by the European Commission and were, among others, important elements for the country-specific recommendations proposed by the European Commission in early June 2019. Three country-specific recommendations, formally adopted by the (Ecofin) Council on 9 July 2019 after extensive discussion in the committees and substantive debates within the Council, were addressed to Austria.

On 26 February 2020, an extensive country report was presented by the European Commission on each EU Member State, providing an assessment of economic and social challenges as well as of progress concerning the implementation of the country-specific recommendations 2019, along with an overview of attainment of national Europe 2020 targets (European Commission, 2020a). In compliance with the strategic requirements under the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2020 (European Commission, 2019a, p. 17), also Austria's progress towards reaching the United Nations' sustainable development goals (SDGs) was assessed for the first time, in a separate annex.

In its analysis, the European Commission comes to the assessment that Austria has made limited, respectively some, progress overall in addressing the country-specific recommendations from the year 2019 (European Commission, 2020a, p. 18). With regard to fiscal sustainability, it is noted that limited progress was made on the pension system, on long-term care and towards reforming fiscal relations between the various levels of government. The European Commission found that some progress has been made on healthcare. The same applies to Austria's efforts to reduce labour taxes, especially for families and low-income earners. Improvements were recorded in labour market outcomes for women, but the report states that the rate of women in part-time employment remains very high and that childcare coverage varies from federal province to federal province. Some progress was also made on the digitalisation of businesses, investments in research and development (R&D)

and innovation, as well as with regard to the support of productivity growth, while the Commission sees limited progress in improving educational achievements of disadvantaged young people and lowering regulatory barriers in the services sector.

The European Commission's summary in respect of Austria's Europe 2020 targets highlights that Austria is performing very well on the two education targets, having already reached them. The national target for employment and the share of renewable energy has been attained almost. The European Commission notes the ambitious R&D target and appreciates that Austria ranks second behind Sweden in R&D intensity but sees potential for improving the effectiveness of the R&D system. From the point of view of the Commission, more efforts are needed when it comes to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and the improvement of energy efficiency. In both cases, currently the national target is not reached yet. Although to date Austria has not quite reached its national target regarding poverty within the scope of the Europe 2020 strategy, namely to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion by 235,000 (the actual reduction amounting to 187,000 persons), the past ten years nevertheless saw a lot of progress. It is particularly positive that the percentage of those suffering severe material deprivation was more than halved within ten years, going down from 5.9% to 2.8%.

Austria's performance on the social scoreboard supporting the European pillar of social rights is also better than average. Potential for improvement exists in particular where the labour market participation of women and older workers is concerned, which generally coincides with the country-specific recommendations.

Austria performs well on the SDGs. Particularly, the high level of the social targets attained in this area, as well with regard to securing access to sustainable energy, is noted. (European Commission, 2020, p.11)

The present National Reform Programme is based on the guidelines of October 2019 and incorporates the analysis and conclusions of the country report. As far as possible given the tight deadline, updated guidelines from April are accounted for. The National Reform Programme has two annexes, which provide an overview of the reform measures taken at federal and provincial government level as well as by the social partners.

The National Reform Programme 2020 was drawn up before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Against this backdrop, some statements and representations have been over-

taken by reality and cannot be maintained in this form. The European Commission has requested member states for the timely submission of Stability and convergence programmes, as well as National Reform Programmes, in line with Regulations No 1466/97, as amended by Regulation 1175/2011. Austria assumes that an opportunity to discuss the impact of Covid-19 and reassess the challenges accordingly will be available in the course of the European Semester. In any case, the recommendations of the European Commission for the year 2020/2021 will have to take the changed conditions into account. In July 2020, Austria is going to present the Voluntary National Review Report on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (VNR) in the context of the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in New York. For this reason, the SDGs are not dealt with in detail in the National Reform Programme.

2 Overall economic environment

The boom which peaked around the turn of 2017/2018 and was pivotal in driving strong growth in the past few years was followed by a certain slowdown of economic growth, to arrive at 1.6% in 2019. In view of the existing risks affecting trade (amongst others, because of the tensions between China and the US, as well as Brexit) and the weakness of important partner countries in Europe, the current forecast of the EC expects a growth rate of 1.3% for 2020 and 2021.¹(European Commission, 2020b)

Until mid-2019, the key growth drivers were domestic demand and investment in capital goods. Austrian exports benefited from a robust business cycle in CESEE countries in 2019, thus compensating the slowing momentum of goods exports on the global level. In the past few years, corporate investments in capital goods saw a marked expansion. It is expected that the cycle characterised by exceptional volumes of investments in capital goods will peter out in the course of 2020. Investments in housing construction, in contrast, have been rising strongly since 2016, with dynamic investments remaining at a high level, up 4.0%, as 2019 progressed.

Likewise, private consumption provided a strong impetus for Austria's economy, with the satisfactory wage increases in collective bargaining agreements in 2018 and strong job growth as 2019 progressed (+1.5%) contributing to this trend. The Family Bonus Plus scheme, which entered into force on 1 January 2019, had a positive impact on disposable household incomes. Private consumption is forecast to continue supporting economic activity 2020 and 2021.

The slowdown of economic activity is accompanied by labour market momentum cooling down and the rate of jobs growth slowing. On an annual average, unemployment dropped to 7.4% in 2019.² (Federal Ministry of Labour, Family and Youth, BMAFJ, 2020) At the same time, the Austrian labour market is characterised by a continued strong increase in labour supply, which is due, i.a., to rising numbers of older workers remaining in employment, but

¹The possible effects of Covid-19 have not been considered in this forecast.

² National definition (% of persons in payroll employment); according to the Eurostat definition, the unemployment rate for 2019 is 4.6%

also to decreasing numbers of working-age people and to the opening of the Austrian labour market to Croatian nationals.

Inflation, which in 2018 recorded a slight rise to 2.1% because of higher commodity prices, is expected to amount to 1.5% for the year 2019 overall. This is due to the downward price trend for oil and food. A minor increase to 1.6% is expected for 2020.

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic caused a tremendous change in the economic situation. The economy is currently experiencing a shock to both the demand and supply side. As far as possible, effects and measures associated with the corona crisis have already been taken into account in the most recent forecasts issued by the Austrian Institute of Economic Research (WIFO) and the Vienna Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS). According to their figures, the unemployment rate will rise by 0.9 percentage points, to 8.3%, in Austria (acc. to the national definition). Owing to the shutdown and the related slump in economic performance, GDP growth will decrease markedly. Currently, it is expected to amount to -2.5% in 2020.

Detailed information concerning the impact on the budget is available in the Austrian Stability Programme 2019 to 2024.

A package of measures in the amount of EUR 38 billion was prepared in an effort to mitigate the effects of the corona crisis. Of EUR 4 billion committed to immediate aid, EUR 3 billion are going to be used for funding short-time working. A simplified procedure was worked out with the social partners in order to safeguard jobs and operational know-how. Working hours can be reduced to a minimum of 10% as calculated over an extended averaging period. A worker's remuneration will amount to between 80% and 90% of his/her current net pay. Apprentices will get 100%. Dismissal protection for one month following the short-time working period has been agreed. The Public Employment Service Austria (Arbeitsmarktservice, AMS) will pay the employer's share of the social security contributions. EUR 10 billion have been budgeted for tax deferrals. Taxpayers can be granted a respite for the payment of income tax, corporate income tax and value-added tax (without incurring interest) and payments on account to be made in respect of income tax and corporate income tax can be reduced. In a bid to quickly compensate income losses, another EUR 15 billion have been earmarked as emergency aid for business sectors hit particularly hard by the corona crisis. In addition, EUR 9 billion have been earmarked as guarantees and assumption of liability to collateralise loans and ensure the liquidity of enterprises.

Furthermore, an emergency call for Covid-19 research was launched. Funding totalling EUR 23 million is provided.

3 Country-specific recommendations - structural reforms

The reforms undertaken over the past twelve months and the corresponding agreements laid down in the Government Programme 2020-2024 aim to set a targeted structural policy course in order to strengthen the country's position as a business location, increase the employment rate, reduce public debt and improve the basis for growth. In order to strengthen the growth potential, public investment will be channelled to future-oriented areas, such as digitalisation, enhancement of infrastructure, e-mobility and education. The federal government regards the current challenge of climate change as a great opportunity for innovative strategies. To leverage productive potential, the federal government is committed to a technology initiative, an ecological modernization of the economy and new research focus areas in the field of alternative energy sources. At the same time, the parameters for an eco-social tax reform are being worked out to secure competitiveness, provide income relief, enhance steering effects and counteract negative distributional effects.

3.1 Country-specific recommendation no. 1

'The Council recommends that Austria take action in 2019 and 2020 to ensure the sustainability of the health, long-term care, and pension systems, including by adjusting the statutory retirement age in view of expected gains in life expectancy; simplify and rationalise fiscal relations and responsibilities across layers of government and align financing and spending responsibilities.'

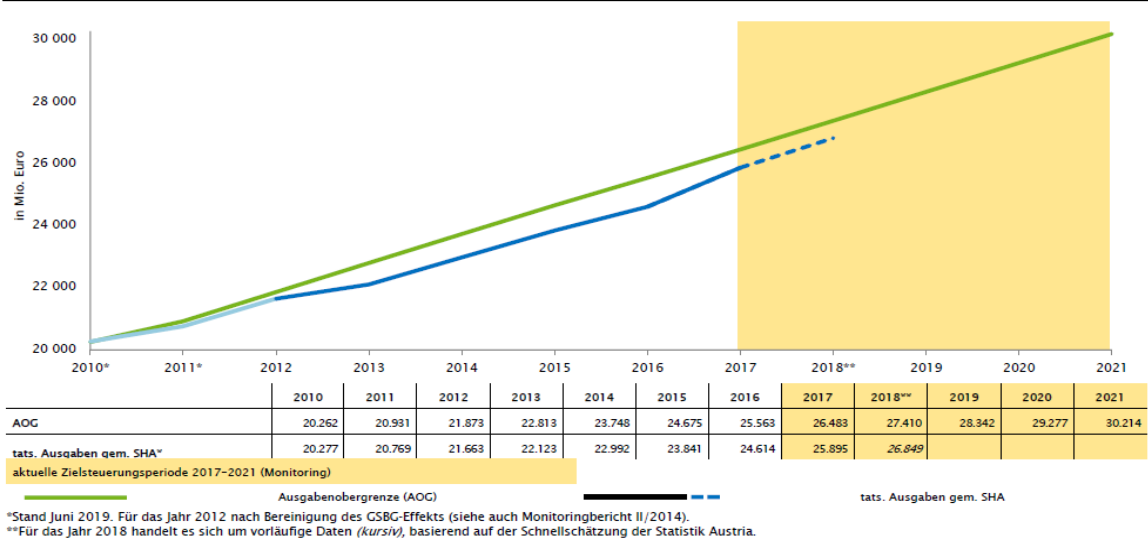
3.1.1 Sustainability of the healthcare and long-term care systems

The projections of the most recent Ageing Report (European Commission, 2018) and the Debt Sustainability Monitor (European Commission 2020c, p. 11) show medium risk regarding long-term fiscal sustainability, which is due to an increase in ageing expenses in particular in the fields of healthcare and long-term care. According to the forecasts of the European Commission, healthcare expenditure will rise by 0.7 percentage points, from 7% of the

GDP in 2016, to 7.7% over the medium term (until 2040). Until 2070, expenditure is expected to rise by 1.3 percentage points, to 8.3% of the GDP. In the field of long-term care the European Commission assumes expenditure to rise from 1.9% of the GDP (2016) to 2.6% in 2040 and 3.8% in 2070. (European Commission, 2018, p. 335)

The health insurance system provides all Austrians with high-quality healthcare and a wide range of healthcare services. With regard to medium- and long-term funding and quality assurance, reforms were launched as early as in 2012 and 2013 which aimed to improve people’s health and increase their life expectancy, on the one hand, and progressively curb annual expenditure growth, on the other hand. The key fiscal policy instrument has always been the Target Control Agreement entered into by and between the federal government, the provincial governments and social security carriers. The second Target Control Agreement, concluded for the period 2017-2021, provides for lowering the growth rate of healthcare expenditure from 3.6% in 2017 to 3.2% by 2021. (Federal Law Gazette I No. 97/2017)

Chart 1: Public healthcare expenditure 2010-2021 excluding long-term care in EUR million



Source: Monitoring, GÖG 2019

According to the latest monitoring report, with reference to the System of Health Accounts (SHA), public healthcare expenditure amounted to EUR 25.9 billion in 2017, which is some EUR 588 million (=2.22%) below the expenditure ceiling agreed upon for that period. For 2018, a flash estimate by Statistics Austria is available. Expenditure was found to fall some EUR 561 million (=2.05%) short of the ceiling. (Bobek et.al., 2019, p. 2)

With a view to relieving the costly hospital sector, the reforms aim in particular to shift treatments away from inpatient care to outpatient services, with a focus on improving primary care. Under the Target Control Agreement 2017, it was agreed to establish 75 multi-professional and/or interdisciplinary primary care units by 2021. Currently, 21 primary care centres are available, distributed over all federal provinces except Vorarlberg. An official commitment to setting up eight further units has already been obtained and another project is in the planning stage.³ In cooperation with the European Investment Bank (EIB), attractive long-term funding is offered to potential founders of primary care units. The investment volume earmarked for the years to come amounts to a total of EUR 360 million (including EUR 180 million in EIB funds); amongst other benefits, favourable interest rates are offered. Specific support with starting up a primary care centre is also offered under the European Commission's Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP) to increase the number of such units - especially also in rural regions. The general agreement on primary care⁴ concluded in late April 2019 by and between the Austrian Medical Chamber and the Main Association of Austrian Social Security Institutions was another step towards having more outpatient basic healthcare provided close to home.

The Government Programme 2020-2024 attributes great importance to long-term care, recognising it as a responsibility of society as a whole. (Federal Government, 2020, p. 242 et seqq.) To implement the relevant measures envisaged in the Government Programme, a taskforce named 'Pflegevorsorge' is going to be established which shall consult with and coordinate all stakeholders in the field of long-term care. In addition, the Government Programme provides for concentrating and expanding the flows of funds already coming from the federal budget, taking into account demographic and qualitative trends (e.g. long-term care allowances (Pflegegeld), LTC funds (Pflegefonds), expansion of the hospice system, special subsidy, recourse to assets, support of 24-hour-care, carers' leave allowance, substitute care, social insurance for family carers). For this purpose, the Pflegevorsorge taskforce is intended to work out a target control system shared by the federal government and the provincial governments, and a funding concept. The flows of funds shall be examined to ensure that moneys are used effectively. Another focus of the Government Programme is on timely prevention. The role of prevention in the context of long-term care is also ex-

³ cf. Österreichisches Forum Primärversorgung im Gesundheitswesen; (<https://primaerversorgung.org/>)

⁴ cf. Primärversorgungs-Gesamtvertrag (general agreement on primary care) of 24 April 2019; (https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokumente/Avsv/AVSV_2019_0073/AVSV_2019_0073.html) (available in German only)

amined within the IHS study dealing with approaches to reforms needed for the future funding of long-term care ('Zukünftige Finanzierung der Langzeitpflege - Ansatzpunkte für Reformen' (2019)). Prevention strategies could also draw on the know-how of the social security institutions.

To establish a sound basis for planning future personnel requirements in the care sector, Gesundheit Österreich GmbH (GÖG) was commissioned to carry out a nationwide study on care personnel requirements. The results were made available last autumn. Based on the demographic trend, the estimate for additional qualified care personnel needed in 2030 is some 34,000 persons. Adding the personnel gap caused by retirement, the forecast for the total number of persons required for care giving in 2030 is some 76,000. (BMASGK et.al., 2019, p. 5 and pp. 38-46) With a view to the increase in personnel requirements, the federal government has already taken specific steps concerning education and training. To increase the appeal of the caregiving/nursing professions, new education and training programmes will be offered at several locations starting with the school year 2020/21 (currently, it is planned to have ten pilot projects, i.e., seven five-year programmes at institutions of higher education (Höhere Lehranstalten) for care and social professions and three three-year programmes at specialised upper-secondary level schools (Fachschulen) for caregiving/nursing professions). The institution Höhere Lehranstalt für Sozialbetreuung und Pflege (MRV 2/8, 2020a) planned for higher education in social care and nursing will be the first school where students can complete high-quality caregiving/nursing training with Matura, the school-leaving exam giving access to university education. As far as three-year programmes are concerned, the planned school Fachschule für Sozialberufe mit erweiterter Autonomie will be able to teach parts of the curriculum of care assistant training so that subsequent care assistant training will be much shorter.

3.1.2 Sustainability of the pension system

The European Commission regularly points out the necessity to secure the medium- and long-term sustainability of the Austrian pension system. According to the calculations made by the EC, expenditure is expected to rise by 1.0 percentage points to 14.9% of GDP by 2040, due to the retirement of the baby boomer generation (people born between 1956 and 1969). After that climax, expenditure is expected to go down progressively by 0.6 percentage points to 14.3% of GDP by 2070. (European Commission, 2018, p. 66)

The European Commission believes that pension models linking retirement age to rising life expectancy are expedient tools for keeping the public subsidy at a stable level over the medium term. From the federal government's perspective, however, the current challenge is to gradually harmonise the effective and statutory retirement ages without raising long-term unemployment among the elderly. (Federal Government, 2020, p. 252) According to the most recent figures available from the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection (BMSGPK), the effective retirement age was 61.5 years for men and 59.4 years for women in 2018.⁵

The federal government applies multiple levers to address the very complex challenges regarding the pension system. With a view to demographic change, taking action to preserve older workers' fitness to work is increasingly gaining in importance. A policy of integrating or reintegrating older workers into the labour market has been consistently pursued for years. The principle of *rehabilitation and reintegration instead of early retirement* was enshrined in legislation already in 2014 in the course of reforming disability pensions (Federal Law Gazette I No. 3/2013). A legal right to vocational rehabilitation was introduced in January 2017. The Government Programme 2020-2024 promotes keeping workers longer in gainful employment by means of targeted action, such as optimising the rules for part-time retirement and for part-time work to reintegrate employees after long-term sick leave. Businesses shall be given incentives to expand their occupational healthcare management structures and develop models for targeted health and ageing management.

Besides raising the effective retirement age, the focus is on improving the economic and social living conditions of pensioners and on combating old age poverty. As women are at a higher risk of old age poverty, due to gaps in their employment history or to part-time employment, it is intended to implement in the current legislative period a bundle of measures including, amongst other elements, more information as to the detrimental consequences of part-time work and missing contributions. Currently, an in-depth analysis regarding gender-specific differences in old-age pension payments is being worked out under the TRAPEZ research programme co-financed by the EU; also options for action are being worked out.⁶ Partial outcomes of the study will be published in spring 2020, and this will be followed by the launch of a comprehensive information campaign. A new pension splitting model shall be worked out (Federal Government, 2020, p. 251). Under the present voluntary pension

⁵ cf. BMSGPK, Online Pension Information System (OPIS), <https://www.dnet.at/opis/Pensionversicherung.aspx>, date: 10/02/2020

⁶ cf. TRAPEZ, <https://www.trapez-frauen-pensionen.at/english.html>, date: 10/02/2020

splitting system (existing since 2005), it is possible, during the first seven years after a child is born, to earmark up to 50% of the credits made to the working parent's pension account for the benefit of the partner leaving work after the child was born to take care of its upbringing. Opting for such pension splitting is possible until the youngest child is 10 years old.

Another lever that can be applied to ensure social protection for the aged, in addition to the public pension system, is to expand and/or improve the second and third pillars. To enhance the income situation of pensioners, the federal government intends to create a suitable environment for a general pension fund agreement and to further develop investment options in the field of state-aided pension plans (Federal Government, 2020, p. 71).

3.1.3 Funding and spending competences at various levels of government

It is intended to optimise the funding and spending competences at federal, regional and communal levels in the legislative period to come. Uniform effectiveness targets are to be defined and provided with corresponding indicators. Analysing a financial responsibility mechanism with regard to the climate protection objectives set by the EU is envisaged to support reaching the climate goals as a shared responsibility. Possible connecting factors would be the fields of local public passenger transport, housing subsidies and housing construction.

Last year saw a reform of the transparency database (Federal Law Gazette I No. 70/2019). The amendment aims to improve the efficiency of the public funding system, avoid multiple funding, and increase transparency. Based on the experience acquired, it was agreed in close dialogue with the federal provinces to feed projects and/or the granting of funding into the database already upon making the commitment to payment. Furthermore, it was made mandatory to include a description of the subject of the funding (on the basis of a pre-defined catalogue).

The reform of the organisation of the fiscal administration system will enter into force January 2021. (Federal Law Gazette I No. 104/2019) Essentially, this means that the responsibilities of the 40 tax offices now existing across Austria will be concentrated and centralised in two fiscal authorities with nationwide competence, one for large companies (*Finanzamt für Großbetriebe*) and one for all other taxpayers (*Finanzamt Österreich*). In addition, the nine existing customs offices will be combined into one fiscal authority having nationwide competence and will be known as Customs Office Austria (*Zollamt Österreich*) in future. The

tasks currently fulfilled by the financial police (Finanzpolizei), tax investigators (Steuerfahndung) and the financial penal authorities (Finanzstrafbehörden) will in future be concentrated in a separate anti-fraud office (Amt für Betrugsbekämpfung (ABB)).

3.2 Country-specific recommendation no. 2

‘The Council recommends that Austria take action in 2019 and 2020 to shift taxes away from labour to sources less detrimental to inclusive and sustainable growth; support full-time employment among women, including by improving childcare services, and boost labour market outcomes for the low skilled in continued cooperation with the social partners; raise the levels of basic skills for disadvantaged groups, including people with a migrant background.’

3.2.1 Taxes and duties

The tax burden is comparatively heavy in Austria. At 42.3% of GDP in 2018, the tax-to-GDP ratio is clearly above the EU-27 average (40.2%) and also above the level of the euro zone (40.6%) (Eurostat, 2020a). It is intended to change the tax structure in the course of the current legislative period. The following reform targets have been defined: (i) tax relief, (ii) ecological-social reorientation, (iii) simplification of the tax system and (iv) improving service orientation. It is intended to lower the tax-to-GDP ratio towards the 40% mark (Federal Government, 2020, p. 76 et seqq.).

First relief measures were worked out already in spring 2019 and adopted by the Austrian National Council in September 2019 (Federal Law Gazette I No. 103/2019). The centrepiece is to reduce the tax burden on low-income earners as well as farmers and tradespersons. The introduction of a social security bonus (Sozialversicherungsbonus) on 1 January 2020 reduced health insurance contributions payable by low-income earners. If the annual earnings amount to EUR 15,500 or less, a deduction amount - the Sozialversicherungsbonus - will be credited towards the health insurance contributions. The credit decreases as incomes rise up to a maximum amount of EUR 21,500 in annual earnings. Furthermore, the traffic tax credit was raised by an additional EUR 300 for those earning not more than EUR 15,500. With earnings between EUR 15,000 (sic!) and EUR 21,500, this additional amount will also be gradually reduced to zero. Relief for tradespeople and farmers will be based on a different system. Irrespective of the amount of earnings, the general health insurance

contribution rates will be lowered uniformly by 0.85 percentage points - from 7.65% to 6.8%. The tax burden on pensioners will also be reduced by up to EUR 200 a year, given an increase in the Pensionistenabsetzbetrag, i.e. the tax credit automatically taken into account by the institution paying out the pension.

For owners of small enterprises, the limit for VAT-free income was raised from EUR 30,000 to EUR 35,000. With regard to income tax it has been possible since 1 January 2020 to reduce the administrative burden by applying for a flat rate for revenues below EUR 35,000. The current limit allowing depreciation of low-value assets in full in the year of their acquisition was raised from EUR 400 to EUR 800. This increase generates investment incentives and causes a marked simplification of administration as for several assets it will in future no longer be necessary to distribute the expense over several years and to keep a schedule of assets.

With reference to the shifting to other tax sources, a 5% tax on online advertising revenue (*Digitalsteuer*) was introduced in 2020 in the course of the revision of the Tax Amendment Act (*Abgabenänderungsgesetz*). To avoid distortions of competition, the exemption from VAT applying to imports of small shipments worth less than EUR 22 was cancelled. To efficiently implement correct taxation, a record-keeping obligation applies to electronic interfaces (e.g. platforms, market places) as from 1 January 2020. Such records concerning revenue from accommodation provided via a platform, or revenue from intra-Community mail order shipments by businesses established in the Union, must be made available electronically to the competent tax office upon request.

Major steps towards greening the tax system were taken, for instance, by adopting new rules regulating the car registration tax ('duty based on standard consumption' (*Normverbrauchsabgabe*) and the ongoing motor-vehicle tax ('engine-related insurance tax' (*motorbezogene Versicherungssteuer*)). In future, less favourable terms for vehicles with high carbon emissions will ensue from a corresponding adjustment of the computation formula, and besides engine output also the carbon emission of the motor vehicle will be taken into account when calculating the engine-related insurance tax. In addition, environmentally friendly green electricity generated by means of a private photovoltaic system and directly consumed by the owner of such system has benefited from an unlimited exemption from electricity taxes since 1 January 2020; biogas and sustainably generated hydrogen can also be exempted from natural gas tax if they are admixed with natural gas.

A tax system producing economically, socially and ecologically desirable steering effects in a bid to combat climate change and protect Austria's position as a business location is important to the federal government. Working out specific reform proposals was assigned to a task force established specifically for this purpose, which took up work in February (MRV 7/10, 2020b). Among other things, this task force will deal with putting a price on carbon emissions in the non-ETS area and work out necessary compensation measures for groups of persons particularly impacted. Also developments seen in this field at EU law level are planned to be integrated into the work of the task force.

3.2.2 Labour market: Women and low-skilled persons

From the perspective of the European Commission, both increasing the employment rate and/or the full-time employment among women as well as improving labour market outcomes of the low-skilled are important elements for sustaining the macroeconomic performance and increasing the production potential.

The labour market participation rate among women has been increasing steadily in the course of the last decade, from 68.2% in 2009 to 71.7% in 2018 (Eurostat, 2020b). Austria is thus significantly above the EU-27 average (66.5%); however, part-time employment is also on the rise. In 2018, almost every second woman was working part-time (46.9%) (BMAFJ, 2020). Even though a strong increase in part-time employment among men can be observed as well over the same period, from 8.8% in 2009 to 14.9% in 2018, this is mostly due to other reasons (Eurostat, 2020c). According to a survey on work-family balance which was carried out in 2018 in all EU Member States, 39% of women with care responsibilities for children under the age of 15 reduced the working hours in their gainful employment (Statistics Austria, 2019a, p. 36). The same applies to only 5% of fathers. The survey clearly shows that women taking advantage of childcare facilities re-enter the labour market sooner; the same applies to taking up full-time employment (Statistics Austria, 2019a, p.33).

This data indicates that offering affordable good-quality formal childcare all over Austria is pivotal in enabling women to re-enter the labour market and also take up full-time employment. The data provided by Statistics Austria shows a strong increase in the number of 0- to 2-year-olds being cared for in childcare facilities in all federal provinces. Since the first Article 15a agreement between the federal government and the provincial governments on fundings for the expansion of childcare has been concluded in 2008, the number of children in this age group attending childcare has more than doubled and the childcare coverage

rate rose from 14% (2008) to 26.5% (2018). In the 3-5 age group, the combined childcare coverage rate was at 93.7% (2018). (Statistics Austria, 2019b)

As the federal government considers providing childcare an important step towards promoting equality between men and women on the labour market, creating 10,000 new childcare places each year is provided for in the Government Programme. A second compulsory year of pre-school education is also contemplated over the medium term (Federal Government, 2020, p. 283). In addition, more information is to be provided with regard to the consequences of part-time work on social security and future pension entitlements. With respect to improving parental leave management, information activities will be carried out already before parental leave is taken, in particular also in connection with legal options available within the context of parental leave.

Against this backdrop, it is also crucial to foster a fair division of family and caring activities between the partners. For this purpose, the Government Programme (Federal Government, 2020, p. 261) provides for the assessment of a timeframe model in connection with incentives aimed at a fair division of work between partners (Federal Government, 2020, p. 261). Since 1 September 2019, fathers have a statutory legal entitlement to take up leave from work against suspension of remuneration on the birth of their child (Daddy Month (Papamonat)).⁷ Already since 2017, fathers may also apply for financial support during this period in the form of a family-time bonus (Familienzeitbonus).⁸ In order to get more women into the labour market, the AMS is spending a disproportionately high amount of funds on promoting women. In 2019, the AMS supported 51.6% of unemployed women and 48.4% of unemployed men (44.6% of the unemployed are women and 55.3% are men). (BMAFJ, 2020)

Further challenges women are facing with regard to work-life balance are unforeseeable working hours and long travel times to work. Against this backdrop, the Government Programme provides for strengthening the rural area to improve the chances of women living there to enter the labour market (key word digitalisation) (Federal Government, 2020, p. 274). Although shifting to a service economy significantly improves employment opportunities in rural areas, further parameters also require improvement, as shown in a survey

⁷ Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection <https://www.sozialministerium.at/Themen/Arbeit/Arbeitsrecht/Karenz-und-Teilzeit/Papamonat.html> (available in German only), date: 28/02/2020

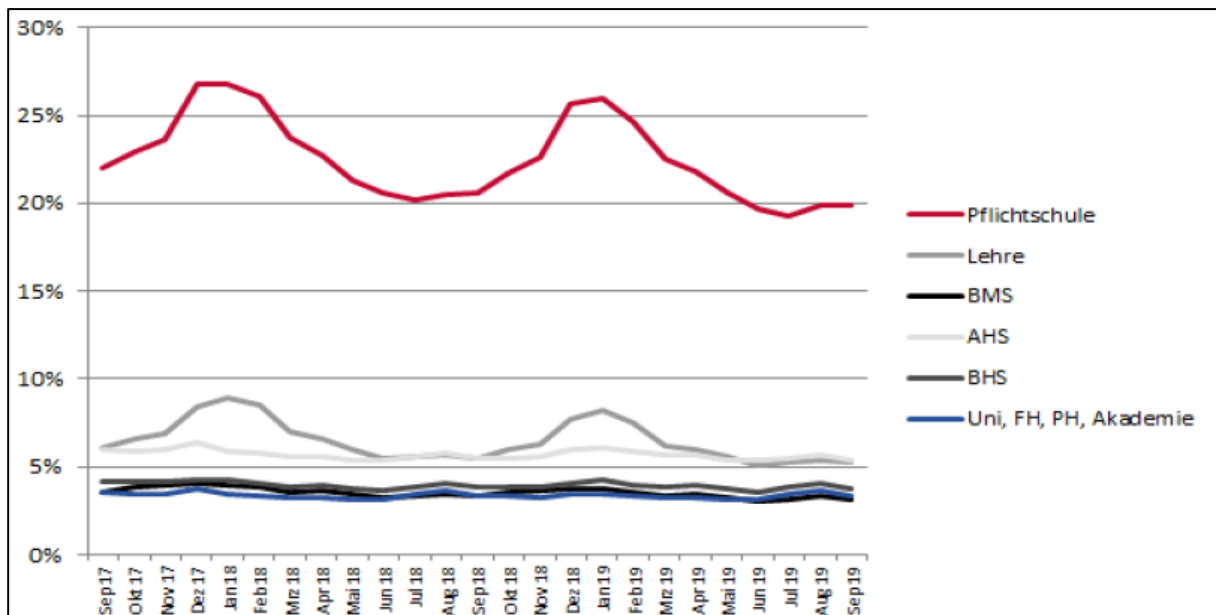
⁸ Former competence of the Federal Chancellery <https://www.bmfj.gv.at/familie/finanzielle-unterstuetzungen/familienzeitbonus.html> (available in German only), date: 28/02

commissioned by the former Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Regions and Tourism. (Bergmann, N. et.al. 2019, p. 15 et seqq.) Particularly with a view to the gender pay gap, it is important to also improve the professional qualifications, as women are still more often working in low-paid service occupations and in sectors with lower income possibilities.

At 19.9% in 2017, Austria's gender pay gap was higher than the EU average of 16% (European Commission, 2020, p. 33). Many young people still choose their profession based on gender stereotypes. In the context of a more effective organisation of the AMS, the Government Programme therefore provides for the promotion of, before all, women in technical professions as well as for employing men in care professions. The upskilling programme for women in trades and technical jobs (Frauen in Handwerk und Technik, FiT) gives women interested in tech a second chance to obtain the relevant vocational training (AMS, 2019c). Vocational training and continuing education opportunities are aimed at opening up new perspectives. In a bid to move away from traditional role models and to bring more women into technical apprenticeships, guiding measures are developed. In 2019 for example, within the context of the company-based promotion of apprenticeships, multiple support measures were established and implemented to foster the training of women in non-classical, in particular technical, professions. Furthermore, the federal government promotes company-related projects to achieve a balanced access of women and men to the individual apprenticeships. The Government Programme also promises adequate solutions to be developed for low-wage sectors (where the actual salaries are lower than the lowest salaries defined in the collective agreements of the industrial sector) with the involvement of the social partners (Federal Government, 2020, pp. 234 and 257).

In the country-specific recommendations, the European Commission requests Austria to improve the labour market outcomes of the low-skilled (= persons who have completed compulsory schooling at most). In comparison to formally higher qualified workers, the low-skilled face increasing difficulties in accessing attractive jobs. The increase in the unemployment rate is based on the fact that in the course of the progressing structural change of the economy, a clear shift in the demand for labour force towards higher qualified workers occurred, thus reducing job opportunities for persons with a low level of formal education. This is aggravated by the fact that employment prospects diminish the longer unemployment lasts because, among other things, the acquired skills lose their value.

Chart 2: Unemployment rate as a percentage over time acc. to education level



Source: AMS

Persons with low levels of qualification, older workers and persons with health restrictions are the main groups at risk of long-term unemployment. Compared to groups with other (higher) levels of education, the unemployment rate among compulsory school graduates was by far the highest with 19.9% (data from September 2019). (AMS, 2020)

Already in 2012, the Adult Education Initiative (*Initiative Erwachsenenbildung*) was introduced to increase the chances of the low-skilled to participate in the labour market. Within the scope of this joint initiative of the federal government and the provincial governments, youths and adults are given the opportunity to complete compulsory schooling at a later stage in life and/or to acquire basic skills free of charge.⁹ In 2018, it was decided that the initiative should continue due to the evidenced success of the first and second programme period, e.g. high completion rate or the improvements made by the participants with regard to content, learning and working techniques as well as psychosocial aspects, and the wide acceptance of the qualitative standards. The third programme period builds on the previous programmes, with need-based developments and adjustments to content having been made (Adult Education Initiative, 2018).

⁹ Further information on the Adult Education Initiative are available at: <https://www.initiative-erwachsenenbildung.at/initiative-erwachsenenbildung/was-ist-das/> (available in German only)

Upskilling measures aiming to combine work and learning have also proven successful. The labour market instrument AQUA (Qualification at the Workplace (Arbeitsplatznahe Qualifizierung)) combines theoretical and practical elements of education thus improving the labour market chances of, before all, persons with a low level of education. Fit for Education (AusbildungsFit) is a an offer with low-threshold access aimed at disadvantaged youths after they have completed compulsory schooling.¹⁰ In order to further strengthen the concept of lifelong learning within the education system, the Government Programme provides, inter alia, for the legal basis of adult learning to be revised and updated, thus making adult learning become a part of the education system (Federal Government, 2020, p. 302).

Due to the technological change, basic skills offers must also be adjusted and further developed. As digital skills are counted among the basic skills of the 21st century, special attention is placed on this aspect of upskilling. Based on the European DigComp 2.1 Digital Competence Framework, the digital competence model *DigComp 2.2. AT* was established for Austria (Federal Ministry for Digital and Economic Affairs, 2020). Comparable to the categorisation of language skills, levels of digital competence are determined based on certain skills and abilities in this model. Austria is the first country to have included in its model the proficiency level 0 for persons with no experience with digitalisation. The career orientation platform www.digitaleberufe.at was established together with the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research and the digital economy. The project provides teachers, students and parents with information on digital jobs and is meant to encourage young persons' interest in digital jobs.

All in all, the different measures aimed at the target group of low-skilled persons have, by all means, proven to be effective and are also showing results. With respect to the European Commission's conclusion in its country report that no progress has been made in connection with the country-specific recommendation to improve the labour market outcomes of the low-skilled (European Commission, 2020, p. 41), it can be argued that between 2008 and 2018 the number of low-skilled persons decreased by some 264,400 (- 20%) (Eurostat, 2020d).

¹⁰ Programme AusbildungsFit
https://www.oesterreich.gv.at/themen/menschen_mit_behinderungen/arbeit_und_behinderung/1/Seite.1240460.html (available in German only), date: 27/02/2020

3.2.3 Improving basic skills of disadvantaged groups

In order to respond to the different strengths, talents and needs of students in Austria in a more effective way, the comprehensive reforms in the education system, which were implemented throughout the past years, are continued and further developed in accordance with the prevalent needs. The Education Laws Bundle (Pädagogigpaket) combines five main reforms aimed at increasing fairness and transparency in the education system and promoting competence-oriented teaching throughout Austria. With the aim to provide all children and youths with the best possible education and job opportunities, the Austrian education policy specifically encourages basic skills development, with a special focus on acquiring German language skills. Respective measures included in the Education Laws Bundle include, inter alia, school readiness assessment criteria determined for the entire country as the basis for successfully starting school, new education plans for primary schools, New secondary schools (Neue Mittelschulen) and the lower level of Academic secondary schools (AHS), which, due to their consistent refocusing on certain skills, enable up-to-date contents and areas of interest to be included and individual schools to focus on different areas. In addition, introducing the obligation to meet defined educational standards is envisaged with a view to ensuring that, to the extent possible, all students meet the minimum standards in German, English and maths (For details see 4.4.1). The preparations for the Education Laws Bundle have already started in early 2018. Until 2023/24, all projects should be made available to schools with binding effect.

Being able to follow classroom instruction in German to an adequate extent is the basis of education outcomes. The 2018 School Organisation Act (Schulorganisationsgesetz 2018) stipulates that children and youths of compulsory schooling age who do not possess adequate German language skills are obligated to attend German language support classes or German language support courses (Federal Law Gazette I No. 35/2018). The Government Programme provides for the further development of language support which is supported academically and assessed on a regular basis (Federal Government, 2020, p. 291).

As the family and social background of children is connected with its educational achievements, the field of early childhood education is attributed great importance for counteracting educational inequalities by providing learning and support offers as comprehensive as possible. Almost all children attend institutional childcare facilities already before starting compulsory schooling. Since 2010, it is compulsory for 5-year-olds to attend pre-school on a half-day basis. At 98.2%, the number of children being provided care for in this age group is extremely high (Statistics Austria, 2020b). In order to improve the promoting potential of pre-school education, the Federal Government aims at concluding an agreement between

the federal government and the provincial governments as of 2022/23 which, for example, defines uniform and binding master plans for education and childcare for all pre-school educational institutions across Austria (Federal Government, 2020, p. 289). A significant increase of the special subsidy provided by the federal government in the context of Article 15a agreement between the federal government and the provincial governments is also envisaged with a view to further developing high-quality childcare opportunities as of the pre-school year 2020/21.

All-day schools are another important tool for improving the basic skills of disadvantaged young people and combating lack of education. In the school year 2019/20, the childcare coverage rate is some 26.5% (non-vocational schools until end of compulsory schooling age plus academic secondary schools, first to ninth grades). Between 2014 and 2018, EUR 800 million were invested in expanding all-day school forms under the relevant agreement between the federal government and the provincial governments, and further 750 million will be invested as of the school year 2019/20 until the school year 2032/33.

In addition to improving institutional childcare offers, specific intervention instruments are available for schools. The project Securing Basic Skills (*Grundkompetenzen absichern*) which has been introduced in the school year 2017/18 is an effective measure. Within the scope of this project, schools whose students did not perform well enough to achieve at least 20% of the educational standards in the educational standard assessments are supported by multi-professional teams to identify their students' strengths and weaknesses as early as possible and to take these into account in the individual and differentiated learning support offered. 404 schools throughout Austria currently participate in this project. Until the end of the programme period in 2021, a total of 504 schools will have been included in the project.

In addition, the 2020-2024 Government Programme mandates a pilot project to be introduced in 100 schools dealing with special challenges and the development of a chances and development index.

In implementing the measures for improving the quality of all levels of the school system which were introduced within the scope of the 2017 Education Reform Act (*Bildungsreformgesetz 2017*), Austria focuses, inter alia, on establishing the quality framework for schools as a guide for the development of schools and teaching, on creating an external school evaluation system and on establishing a comprehensive education monitoring,

which is supported by the Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP) developed by the European Commission.

Multiple levers are thus applied to improve the basic skills of disadvantaged groups as an accumulation of multiple risk factors exists in most cases. In this context, the federal government also aims at increasing the participation of parents in language support measures (Mum Learns German (amongst others, with the targeted support of women with low or none German skills within the program *Mama lernt Deutsch*)), consciously focusing on the integration of women who shall act as a multiplying factor with regard to integration, as well as other measures targeted at the integration of people with a migration background.¹¹ (Federal Government, 2020, p. 237)

3.3 Country-specific recommendation no. 3

“The Council recommends that Austria take action in 2019 and 2020 to focus investment-related economic policy on research and development, innovation, digitalisation, and sustainability, taking into account regional disparities. Support productivity growth by stimulating digitalisation of businesses and company growth and by reducing regulatory barriers in the service sector.”

3.3.1 Investment-related economic policy

Investing in R&D, innovation and digitalisation is crucial for a country’s competitiveness and thus takes top priority in the Austrian economic policy. This priority has also been enshrined in the Austrian budgets of the past two years, which is evidenced by the continuation of the aggressive measures from previous periods (e.g. additional means in the amount of EUR 110 million for the Austrian Science Fund FWF in the period 2018-2021, and EUR 30 million for the Austrian Academy of Sciences (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, ÖAW) within the scope of the performance-based funding agreement for the period 2018-2020). A new research and innovation strategy is currently being developed to set out the key parameters for research, technology and innovation policy for the coming decade, and

¹¹https://www.bmeia.gv.at/fileadmin/user_upload/Zentrale/Integration/Projektfoerderung/Gesamtuebersicht_Foerderungen_2019.pdf

to ensure, jointly with the Research Funding Act (Forschungsfinanzierungsgesetz), long-term orientation and perspectives for funding investments, as well as good framework conditions for top research (Federal Government, 2020, p. 304). Building on the review and the recommendations contained in the OECD report on the Austrian innovation system (OECD, 2018a), a stronger focus shall be placed on the effects of research policy measures and investments (On R&D see also 4.2).

Taking into account the ongoing structural change and the slowing-down of productivity growth which can be observed in most EU countries, strengthening the industry has taken on special importance as it is closely connected to the services sector and digital transformation. For this purpose, a course must be set for the economic policy, framework conditions must be established to facilitate innovation and investments, and an emphasis must be placed on a future-oriented policy to ensure that the demand for skilled workers is met. In addition, current gaps in the digital infrastructure shall be closed. In late 2019, the Austrian Court of Audit (Rechnungshof) submitted a review report on the digitalization strategy (Digitalisierungsstrategie) and issued recommendations (Court of Audit, 2019, pp. 49-52). The recommendations are to be taken into account in particular with a view to implementing key digital projects across local authorities (Federal Government, 2020, p. 316).

Within the scope of the Broadband Billion (Breitbandmilliarde), EUR 170 million are made available to municipalities and network operators for ensuring that future-proof broadband internet is provided. In order to optimise the use of the funds, a restructuring of the Broadband Billion is envisaged. In this context, clearly defined qualitative and temporary development obligations shall apply, including banning the applicant from funding in case of non-compliance (Federal Government, 2020, p. 317).

To successfully master the climate crisis but also to ensure sustainable growth, technological progress and disruptive innovation are called for. For this purpose, the public sector is, on the one hand, to support the transformation process by way of incentives, e.g. by establishing an incentives system for industrial and commercial enterprises, and, on the other hand, to adapt the criteria for climate funding granted from federal funds with the aim of replacing technologies which are not energy efficient. Against this backdrop, the federal government, inter alia, focuses on promoting both the basic research as well as applied research, also in the context of a technology and climate campaign (Federal Government, 2020, p. 304). Targeted funding to be offered by the public sector is envisaged, inter alia, an increase in the budget of the Climate and Energy Fund (Klima- und Energiefonds) (Federal Government, 2020, p. 106). The Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan (Integrierter

Nationaler Energie- und Klimaplan, NEKP) outlines the focus of the investments, which will be on ecological change and sustainability, for the upcoming decade and attributes it to the relevant sectors (BMNT, 2019, p. 262 et seqq.)

The federal government has not only set itself ambitious climate policy goals but also strives to develop a green deal for the Austrian economy. In this context, the R&D priorities are aligned with the respective EU priorities of sustainable development. The Austrian Energy and Climate Strategy (Energie- und Klimastrategie) #mission2030 highlights the importance of research and development for achieving long-term climate and energy goals. Emphasis is placed on the fact that the task of making the decarbonisation agenda technically feasible, economically viable and socially acceptable depends on a long-term research, technology and innovation policy. (BMNT, Federal Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology, 2018, p. 43) In areas currently lacking technological approaches for a low-emission and energy efficient production, an adequate research and innovation policy direction will be promoted. (BMNT, BMVIT, 2018, p. 36) First steps in this direction were taken by stepping up funds for the reduction and decarbonisation of energy demand in buildings by 100% thanks to subsidies in the amount of EUR 140 million for restoration measures and the replacement of boilers. In addition, environmental subsidies in Austria provided an amount of EUR 90 million for corporate efficiency measures and the use of renewable energy sources. This allows to cut down 550,000 tons of carbon dioxide emissions per year and create more than 18,000 jobs. These measures constitute an important boost to economy as they trigger an investment volume of some EUR 1.6 billion.

3.3.2 Growth in productivity, digital transformation, deregulation

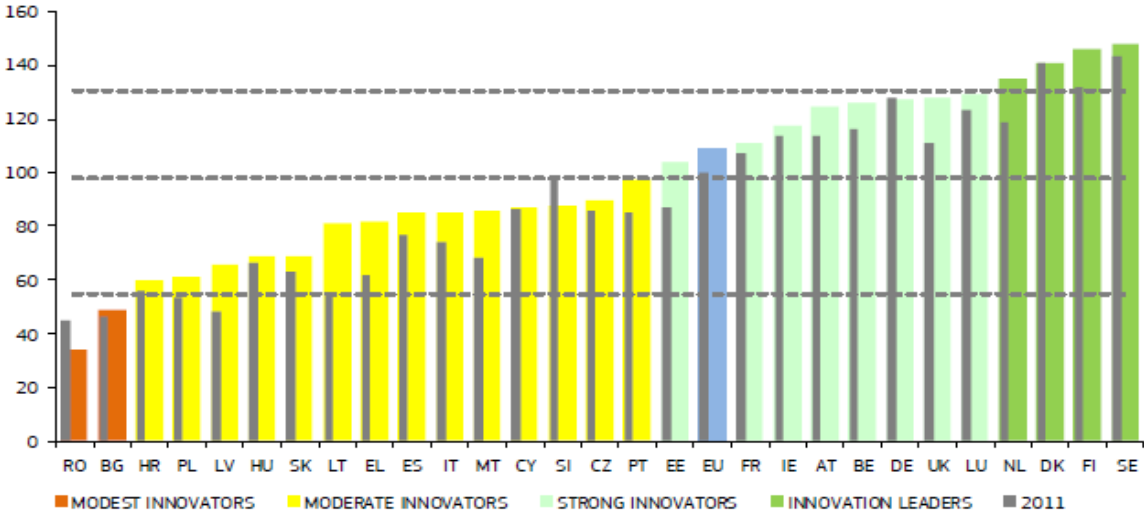
Austria currently ranks ninth in the EU's most important innovation-related country benchmark, the European innovation scoreboard, and thus belongs to the group of Strong Innovators.¹² However, the data also shows that advancing to the group of Innovation Leaders (Sweden, Finland, Denmark and the Netherlands) is becoming increasingly challenging, as Austria competes with countries such as Luxembourg, Germany, Belgium or Ireland which perform equally strong. According to the European Commission, a strong knowledge-intensive high-tech and medium high-tech services sector is crucial for successful structural change and, as a consequence, for the further innovation success. Even though a slow structural change towards more productive sectors was observed in the recent past (2007-2016),

¹²LU, BE, UK, DE, IE, FR and EE are among the Strong Innovators. The Innovation Leaders are SE, FI, DK and NL.

growth in productivity in those sectors was relatively low in international comparison (European Commission, 2020a, p. 49).

An Artificial Intelligence Strategy of the Federal Government (Künstliche Intelligenz Strategie des Bundes) will be implemented, involving clarifying regulatory questions, creating infrastructures as well as defining priorities. In this context, the public sector and the country's attractiveness as a business location are considered as important as questions related to human dignity and democracy.

Chart 3: Innovation in EU Member States



Source: European Commission, 2019b

Increasing productivity and competitiveness also requires knowledge transfer to enterprises, highly skilled workers from abroad and, in particular with regard to SMEs, access to expertise and qualified employees. Since 2019, the Austrian Business Agency (ABA), which started off as an investment promotion agency, has been turning into a business promotion agency and now also strives to attract highly skilled workers from abroad. According to the Government Programme, the ABA unit Work in Austria shall act as the key platform for recruiting specialists from abroad and, in addition, as a service point with regard to the Red-White-Red Card (Rot-Weiß-Rot Karte) (Government Programme, 2002, p. 87 et seq.; p. 192). Boosting the transfer of knowledge and technology from the research to the economy sector has been enshrined in the current performance agreements with universities (2019-2021) and research institutions (Austrian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Science and

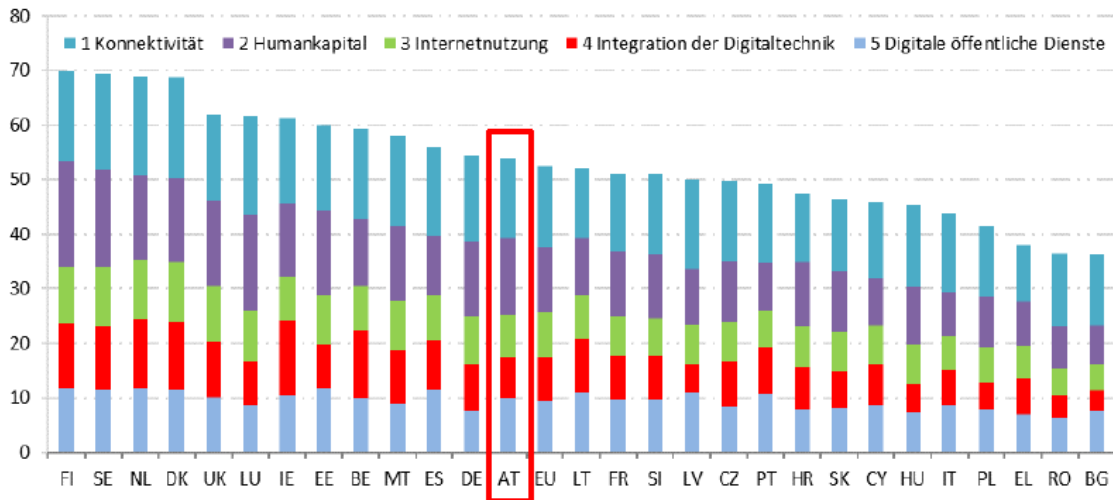
Technology Austria). A special focus is placed on promoting academic spin-offs, which is also supported by the target-oriented Spin-off Fellowships programme.

The Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) ranks Austria in the 13th place stating the country needs to catch up on the integration of digital technology in SMEs (for instance with respect to the use of cloud services, e-invoicing and online sale). In addition, Austria is experiencing a growing lack of ICT specialists. Austria performs above EU average with regard to the use of the Internet by the population, but it clearly lags behind the leading countries in this respect (European Commission, 2019b, p. 3). The data available shows a demand gap, which is why the federal government, jointly with Austria Wirtschaftsservice Gesellschaft mbH (aws) and the Austrian Economic Chamber (Wirtschaftskammer Österreich) initiated a Digitalisation Campaign (Digitalisierungsoffensive) for SMEs in all federal provinces. Based on the current campaign SME Digital (KMU Digital), SMEs are supported in building digital know-how related to their business and in putting their digitalisation projects into practice. (Federal Government, 2020, p. 323)

A particular aspect concerns the progression of digitalisation in agriculture, which can increase efficiency in agricultural production, therefore, enhancing competitiveness of rural areas. In addition, by applying innovative technologies, the agricultural sector can make an important contribution to climate protection, as well as the improvement of food quality. Corresponding research and education programmes can further promote this development.

In this context, promoting further digitalisation of school education is a major priority. Measures developed within the scope of the master plan Digital Education (Digitale Bildung) include, inter alia, integrating digital content and skills in curricula, providing teachers with further training and tailor-made qualifications with regard to digital didactics, and boosting digital education in schools, in particular, by increasing the number of schools in the network.

Chart 4: Ranking according to the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2019



Source: European Commission, 2019c

Since 2019, Digital Innovation Hubs (DIH) have been available to SMEs in Austria in a bid to enable enterprises to integrate digital technologies in their daily practice. The Digital Innovation Hubs are a network of already existing institutions focusing their research on digitalisation (e.g. universities, universities of applied sciences) which form a so-called digital centre. DIH specialists enable SMEs to access state-of-the-art expertise, infrastructure and coaching opportunities for specific innovation projects. In 2019, three DIHs with an operating time of three years each were established in Austria.¹³ Their location was chosen with the aim to provide optimum support for SMEs, also in rural areas.

To step up private-sector participation in research and development, above all by SMEs, research and development activities have been subsidised by tax credits for corporate R&D. The research tax premium was introduced in 2002, amounting to 3% at the time, and was subsequently increased several times. Since 1 January 2018, a research tax premium equaling 14% of the research expenses can be obtained. Evaluation shows that the research tax premium has beneficial macroeconomic effects. In addition to increasing research activities at enterprises already active in R&D, a rise in willingness to assume higher technological risk was observed as well (Ecker, et. al. 2017). Furthermore, more investments are being made in R&D infrastructure and research projects are implemented faster; positive effects in terms of business location are also observed, for instance R&D activities being relocated to

¹³ In September 2019, two Digital Innovation Hubs were established in Lower Austria and another one in November 2019 in Tirol.

Austria. From the federal government's point of view, it is not only necessary to have concrete investments, but also to boost efficiency in the RTI system. (See also 4.2).

Problems in obtaining funding are major impediments to growth and innovation for enterprises. The federal government's aim in the current legislative period is thus to improve the incentives for private venture capital. The economic policy objectives defined in the Government Programme 2020 to 2024 call for an increased use of guarantee instruments. The pilot programme *aws Promissory Note for Guarantees (aws Garantiepromesse)* concerning preliminary guarantees for SMEs is envisaged to be turned into a mainstream programme. Furthermore, guarantee options are to be further developed within the scope of the SME Funding Act (KMU-Förderungsgesetz) and the Guarantees Act (Garantiegesetz) (Federal Government, 2020, p. 97 et seq.). A fund for technology, innovation and growth is also planned which will provide venture capital for the sustainable development of key technologies (Federal Government, 2020, p. 323). To make access to public contracts easier for SMEs, a strategic concept will be drafted in the following months and implemented in early 2021.

With respect to deregulation, the Government Programme provides for a working group to be established across multiple ministries which will be responsible, in a first step, for assessing the deregulation potential and, building on this, for the implementation process. A cut-down of the red tape (Bürokratiebremse) is also envisaged (Government Programme 2020, p. 14). With a view to modernising competition law, a consultation process will be started in the first half of 2020 to ensure improvement of fair economic conditions for European enterprises in the global competition.

4 Europe 2020 targets and SDGs: Progress and measures taken

In June 2010, the heads of state and government adopted the new growth agenda Europe 2020. To implement the strategy, five headline targets with concrete targets at EU level were defined. In addition to them, the then 28 EU Member States each set country-specific targets. The national Europe 2020 targets have since become key benchmarks for policy-making.

Table 1: Overview of the Europe 2020 targets:

	National target		EU28 headline target	
	2020	As of 2018	2020	As of 2018
Employment rate in % (20-64 age group)	77/78	76.2	75	73.2
R&D investments in % of GDP	3.76	3.17	3	2.12
Emission target reduction in non-ETS sectors (from 2005 levels)	-16%	-10.8%	-10%	---
Share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption	34%	33.4%	20%	17.9
Energy efficiency / stabilisation of gross final energy consumption (in Mtoe)	25.1	27.91	1,086	1,124.14
Early leavers from education and training (18-24 year-olds)	9.5%	7.5%(1)	10%	10.3%(1)
Tertiary educational attainment	38%	42.3%(1)	40%	41.3%(1)
Reduction of share of population affected by poverty / social exclusion (from 2008 levels)	-235,000	-187,000	-20M	-7.2M

Source: Eurostat
preliminary value 2019

In July 2020, Austria is going to present the Voluntary National Review Report on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (VNR) in the context of the United Nations

High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in New York. Statistics Austria created a national set of indicators following the proposed indicators by the UN and taking into account the methodological requirements of the European Statistical System and published a corresponding indicator report in March 2020. However, as in some points different approaches in assessing the progress towards the SDGs are used on the national and EU level, respectively, this may lead to divergent results.

First, measurements regarding the respective SDGs are based on different indicators. For instance, the European Commission uses the share of children aged between 4 years and the respective school starting age who attend childcare facilities to monitor the attainment of SDG 4 in the field of early childhood education (European Commission, 2020a, p. 85). On the national level, the childcare rate of 5-year-olds including children enrolled early in primary school is used (Statistics Austria, 2020g). This indicator largely matches the approach adopted by the United Nations, where the share of those children who have completed one year of some formal education programme before school age is used for evaluating progress towards SDG 4 in the field of early childhood education.¹⁴

Furthermore, the indicators are observed over different time horizons. Regarding SDG 13 in the context of climate protection, for instance, the European Commission refers to the development of greenhouse gas emissions in the period 2012 to 2017 (European Commission 2020a, p. 87). Due to this approach, the emissions have increased. On the national level, the relevant period used is 2010 to 2018, where a slightly decreasing tendency can be observed (Statistics Austria, 2020g).

Further deviations in the assessment of the progress of the attainment of the SDGs may result from the fact that the same indicators were used, but calculated differently. The contextualisation of the interpretation of the results also matters. While the European Commission calls for more commitment to the use of renewable energy sources to meet the EU-wide 2030 target, as this figure has been stagnating for years, the national figure of 33.4% of the gross final energy consumption also allows for a positive assessment with regard to the Europe 2020 target of 34%.

¹⁴ <http://tcg.uis.unesco.org/4-2-2-participation-rate-in-organized-learning-one-year-before-the-official-primary-entry-age-by-sex/>, date: 09/03/2020

4.1 Labour market and employment

With an employment rate of 76.2% in 2018, Austria has nearly attained the national Europe 2020 target of increasing the employment rate to 77-78% by 2020. However, the employment rates of men (80.7%) and women (71.7%) reveal a continuing gap in terms of gender-specific labour market participation (Eurostat, 2020b). The unemployment rate was decreasing further in 2019 compared to the previous year and amounted to 7.4% according to the national calculation method (decrease of 0.3 percentage points) and 4.5% according to the calculation by Eurostat (BMAFJ, 2020).

Contrary to the past years, the labour market performance will not improve further according to a forecast of the Austrian National Bank (OeNB). The economic cycle nearing its end was characterised by an exceptionally high employment growth. Since the beginning of 2016, the number of persons in payroll employment has increased by 1.8% annually on average. The employment growth declines to around 1%, while the increase in labour supply remains continually high. Thus, the unemployment rate according to Eurostat definition will increase to 4.8% in 2021. A slight decline to 4.7% is not expected until 2022. (OeNB, 2019)

Table 2: Labour market trend in Austria

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
	Annual change in %				
Total employment (heads)	1.7	1.1	0.7	0.7	0.8
Payroll employment	2.2	1.5	0.9	0.9	1.0
Of which: public service employment	1.1	0.5	0.3	0.1	0.1
Self-employment	-1.6	-1.7	-0.8	-0.6	-0.3
Total hours worked	1.9	0.9	0.4	0.7	0.8
Payroll employment	2.1	1.4	0.7	1.0	1.1
Self-employment	1.0	-1.7	-1.1	-0.8	-0.6
Labour supply	1.0	0.9	0.8	+0.8	0.7
Registered unemployed persons	-11.8	-3.6	2.5	3.1	-2.0

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
	in % of labour supply				
Unemployment rate according to Eurostat	4.8	4.6	4.7	4.8	4.7

Source: OeNB, Economic outlook for Austria (Gesamtwirtschaftliche Prognose), December 2019

The number of persons in payroll employment will increase by 0.9% in the years 2020 and 2021, respectively. A slight acceleration to an increase of 1.0% is not expected until 2022. A problem that has existed on the Austrian labour market for some time concerns the mismatch of labour supply and demand in terms of a widening gap between the respective qualification structures. Together with severe labour shortages in a series of professions, it impedes a further increase in employment. (OeNB, 2019)

The increasing number of job vacancies also indicates labour shortages, in particular in the field of construction and the service sector (European Commission 2020a, p. 32). To react to these challenges in the tourism industry, the Government Programme provides for the adaption of apprenticeships and the introduction of continuing education measures in this field (focus on digitalisation), the adaption of existing annual quotas for seasonal workers and the funding of high-quality accommodation for employees in the tourism industry (Federal Government, 2020, p. 169 and 262). A resolution by the federal council of ministers of 26 February 2020 provides for a simplification of the application procedure for the red-white-red card by digitalising the processes and lowers the limit of the required minimum remuneration; this also aims to alleviate the shortage of skilled labour (MRV 8/12).

Furthermore, Austria needs to catch up in terms of qualifications required on the labour market against the background of technological change. This concerns in particular ICT skills¹⁵ and the fields technology, natural sciences, engineering and mathematics (European Commission, 2020a, p. 33). A survey of the Federation of Austrian Industries (IV) shows that roughly 60% of businesses in the field of technology & production (including IT) report severe recruitment problems (IV, 2018). The increasing demand for life-long learning requires solid basic digital skills – compared to the innovative leaders¹⁶, Austria still has room for

¹⁵ ICT = information and communication technology

¹⁶ These are Sweden, Finland, Denmark and the Netherlands, as defined by the *European innovation scoreboard 2019*. https://ec.europa.eu/growth/content/2019-innovation-scoreboards-innovation-performance-eu-and-its-regions-increasing_en, date: 26/02/2020

improvement in this aspect (European Commission, 2020a, p. 34). The new programme Digital Pro Bootcamps supports businesses in Austria and their employees in the systematic development of IT skills. The projects are intended to increase the IT skills of employees and to thus also enhance the research, development and innovation skills in the companies involved.¹⁷ In November 2019, the first results were presented. For the first four bootcamps recommended by the panel of expert jurors, a total of appr. EUR 1.7 million is provided by the Federal Ministry for Digital and Economic Affairs (BMDW).¹⁸

Against the backdrop of population ageing and the decline in productivity growth in Austria, the employment potential of women, older persons, the low skilled and people with a migrant background should be further exploited (European Commission, 2020a, p. 3 and 32). (Regarding women and the low skilled see 3.2.2.)

In 2018, the gap between the employment rates of migrants (people born outside the EU) and those born in Austria was 13.6 percentage points and thus, is among the widest in the EU (European Commission, 2020a, p. 33). People with a migrant background are overrepresented in low-skilled occupations and underrepresented in highly-skilled occupations (OECD, 2019, p. 34). Not least against the backdrop of the shortage of skilled labour, the Government Programme aims to promote a fast integration of people who have been granted asylum and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection into the labour market by way of qualification, counselling, care and placement measures (Federal Government, 2020, p. 259). The envisaged reorientation of the AMS is intended to create integration offers for priority groups with a migrant background and to expand the offer of German language courses (Federal Government, 2020, p. 260).

The project b.mobile – Turning Potential into Skilled Workers (b.mobile – Fachkräftepotenzial nutzen) specifically targets young adults up to 25 years in need of support, in particular people who have been granted asylum and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection. Supra-regional apprenticeship placement services bringing together young adults in need of support, in particular, people who have been granted asylum and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, and employers in regions suffering a shortage of apprentices, are intended to

¹⁷ Programme Digital Professional <https://www.ffg.at/digital-pro-bootcamps> (available in German only), date: 26/2/2020

¹⁸ OTS press release of 07/11/2019 https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20191107_OTS0094/udolf-strobl-digital-pro-bootcamps-steigern-qualifikation-der-mitarbeiter-entlang-der-gesamten-wertschoepfungskette-bild (available in German only), date: 26/02/2020

both give these young persons career options and at the same time contribute to alleviating the shortage of skilled labour.¹⁹

Within the scope of the Skills Check programme (Kompetenzchecks) of the AMS, a special offer has been introduced for migrants in their mother tongue to survey the qualifications they already have in order to integrate them quickly into the labour market.²⁰ The project was honoured with the United Nations Public Service Award 2019 by the United Nations.

In January 2020, the 14th edition of the programme Mentors for Migrants was launched. The aim of the programme is to support skilled persons with a migrant background in the integration into the labour market or the creation of a business.²¹ An existing programme of the AMS is already specifically aimed at a group, in which people with a migrant background are strongly represented: 53% of returners (women registered as unemployed after having received childcare allowance) have a migrant background. The Re-Entry Support (Wiedereinstieg unterstützen) programme provides financial support for childcare, advisory services in the branch offices by specially trained advisors and a course on returning to the labour market (Wiedereinstieg mit Zukunft) (AMS, 2019c).

Even though the rate of activity of older workers (55+) increased from 46.3% (2015) to 54% (2018), it is below the EU average of 58.7% (European Commission, 2020, p. 33). The increasing participation of older persons in employment is determined, in particular, by demographic trends but also by the constant rise of the labour market participation rate among women. While the entire working age population (15 to 64 years) has increased by only 5.4% since 2008, the number of persons from 50 to 64 years, who are of working age, has risen significantly by 30.2% (AMS, 2019d). To achieve the objective of keeping older workers in employment longer, tried and tested instruments such as fit2work, the 50+ Employment Scheme (Beschäftigungsinitiative 50+) and part-time work to reintegrate employees after long-term sick leave are resorted to (Federal Chancellery, 2019, p. 28). A common

¹⁹ Programme b.mobile – Fachkräftepotenzial nutzen

https://www.wko.at/site/fachkraeftepotenzial/b_mobile.html (available in German only), date: 28/02/2020

²⁰ Programme Kompetenzchecks <https://www.ams.at/regionen/osterreichweit/news/2019/06/un-zeichnet-ams-bietergemeinschaft-mit-public-service-award-aus> (available in German only), date 28/02/2020

²¹ Programme Mentoring für MigrantInnen by ÖIF, WKÖ und AMS

https://www.wko.at/site/Mentoring/WKoe_Mentoring-Projektbericht.pdf (available in German only), date 27/02/2020

platform of the social partners aims at increasing the competitiveness of businesses by promoting the older employees' fitness to work.²² The Government Programme also provides for measures specifically tailored to this group, e.g. an optimisation of part-time retirement with regard to promoting and preserving the employees' health at the workplace. Furthermore, increased incentives should be provided for companies to carry out targeted health and age management, to create an age-appropriate working environment and to offer suitable working models (Federal Government, 2020, p. 252).

A new approach is personalised labour market assistance, which has been implemented all over Austria since January 2020. Statistical profiling is also recommended by the OECD and is already being applied in Australia, Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden and the USA, among others (OECD, 2018b). Commissioned by the AMS, the Synthesis social research institute has developed a model for assessing jobseekers' chances on the labour market based on administrative data. Personal parameters include, for example, gender, age, nationality, education/training, care responsibilities and health restrictions. Jobs held so far (e.g. current occupation), number of hours worked, frequency and duration of unemployment as well as AMS training courses attended are also taken into account. The algorithm helps AMS advisors to evaluate their clients' needs in a more objective manner. A first test run showed that, at 85%, the algorithm's success rate in calculating the real-life labour market chances of men and women is surprisingly high (SynthesisForschung, 2018). What is more, the AMS proceeds on the assumption that women in particular will profit from this new instrument, as they are disproportionately often ranked as requiring increased attention from the AMS. Older workers stand to benefit as well, in the form of more intensive and personalised assistance.

A further challenge for Austria, which applies, in particular, to the labour market, is shaping the transition to a climate-friendly economy in a socially acceptable way. In particular, labour shifts towards alternative technologies will require retraining and continuing education (European Commission 2020, p. 33). The federal government aims to ensure a socially acceptable response to the climate challenges. This includes, for example, a stronger commitment in the fields of education, continuing education, sustainable qualifications (Federal Government, 2020, p. 256). On the basis of a social partners arrangement, the Government Programme provides for the creation of an education account (Bildungskonto), which pro-

²² http://www.arbeitundalter.at/cms/Z03/Z03_50/home (available in German only), date: 05/03/2020

vides social protection for vocational reorientation, vocational training and continuing education. Short-time working should not only be applied in case of economic difficulties, but also when businesses switch to climate-friendly production methods. With regard to the reintegration into sustainable employment, a review of the relevant tools of the AMS is provided for (Federal Government, 2020, p. 259). The Government Programme provides for the modernisation of curricula for apprenticeships; by doing so, new apprenticeships should be created (Federal Government, 2020, p. 258).

4.2 Research and development

According to Statistics Austria's global estimate, a total of EUR 12.8 billion was spent on research and development (R&D) in 2019. This means a rise in total Austrian R&D spending in 2019 by 4.5% up from 2018, reaching 3.19% of GDP. At around EUR 6.27 billion (49.0%), Austrian companies fund the largest part of 2019 total research expenditure. The public sector is expected to have contributed another EUR 4.47 billion (34.9%), with the federal government making by far the largest contribution, with almost EUR 3.8 billion (29.6%). Foreign companies and subsidiaries of foreign companies conducting research in Austria are the third most important source of funding, with EUR 1.99 billion (15.6%). In total, the corporate sector (including foreign subsidiaries in Austria) accounts for about two thirds of research expenditure. (Statistics Austria, 2019e) Austria aims, i.a. under the Austrian RTI Strategy 2020, at increasing the R&D expenditure to 3.76% of the GDP by 2020.

Austria has nearly doubled its research expenditure since 2007, and R&D intensity has increased from 2.42% to 3.19% (2019). (Statistics Austria, 2019) This makes Austria one of the countries with the highest R&D intensity among the EU-27. According to Eurostat 2018, Austria ranks second after Sweden (3.3%) and thus ahead of Germany (3.13%), Denmark (3.03%), Belgium (2.76%) and Finland (2.75%). Average R&D intensity among the EU-27 is 2.19% of GDP. (Eurostat, 2020i)

An interministerial RTI task force is currently preparing the national RTI Strategy 2030 to succeed the Austrian RTI Strategy 2020 *Becoming an Innovation Leader* ('Der Weg zum Innovation Leader'). The work of the task force is carried out in close coordination with a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including the nine Austrian federal provinces, within the scope of the BMBWF-Bundesländerdialog (a platform in which the administrative entities at the federal and provincial levels and agencies in the fields of science and research and development participate). To ensure the broadest possible involvement, an online survey

was conducted from August to October 2019 to generate a maximum of input from stakeholders and interested citizens. In addition, stakeholder workshops on important topics were carried out. The numerous contributions to the topics human resources, basic research, research infrastructure, EU missions and EU partnerships, internationalisation as well as applied research and impact on the economy and society will be included in the creation of the new Austrian RTI Strategy.²³

Based on the new Austrian RTI Strategy, a new Research Funding Act (Forschungsfinanzierungsgesetz) is to be adopted which enables strategic governance and long-term financing of research, technology and innovation (RTI), providing financing and planning security for research funding and non-university research institutions. At the same time, the governance and financing system of the institutions will be unified and simplified. (Federal Government, 2020, p. 310) The Research Framework bill entered the stage of scrutiny already in autumn 2019.

To further improve the quality of research and the overall effectiveness of the research and innovation system as recommended in the OECD Review of Innovation Policy Austria 2018 (OECD, 2018, p. 11), the Government Programme provides for a research excellence initiative to strengthen competitive top-level research. This initiative focuses on the development of clusters of excellence to sustainably strengthen outstanding fields of research through cooperation. 'Emerging Fields' are intended to allow for new fields of research and topics with high innovation potential and by way of the Austrian Chairs of Excellence professorships, researchers from all research disciplines are to be attracted. (Federal Government, 2020, p. 310)

Improved quality of innovative research, of evidence-based policies and of scientific evaluation can be achieved if it is possible to combine and analyse data resources that have been inaccessible to science so far. The Government Programme provides for the creation of an Austrian Micro Data Center and for giving science access to data. (Federal Government, 2020, p. 311)

The Austrian Science Fund (FWF), one of Austria's three main research funding organizations, aims to promote the participation of women in FWF projects at all levels. In 2018, the

²³ <https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/en/topics/rti-strategy.html>, date: 03/03/2020

share of women among researchers funded by the FWF increased again across all staff categories, exceeding the level of 2016. Women are also more present in project leadership: In 2017, the share was 28% and in 2018 it increased to over 34.5%. (BMBWF, BMVIT, BMDW 2019, p. 75) Equality issues are also part of the performance-based funding agreements, e.g. with regard to increasing the representation of women. (BMBWF, BMVIT, BMDW 2019, p. 116)

4.3 Energy and climate change

Within the scope of the Europe 2020 strategy, Austria agrees to meet the following three targets by 2020: (i) a 16% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in sectors not participating in EU emissions trading (from 2005 levels), (ii) a 34% share of renewables in gross final energy consumption and (iii) a reduction of the final energy consumption to 25.1 Mtoe (oil equivalent) and/or to no more than 1,050 PJ (petajoule).

Table 3: Europe 2020 targets and climate and energy targets 2030 – comparison

	2020		2030	
	Europe	National target	Europe	National target
Emission target reduction in non-ETS sectors (from 2005 levels)	-10%	-16%	-30%	-36% ²
Energy efficiency	-20% (indicative value)	1,050 PJ	-32.5% (indicative value)	-25-30% ¹
Renewables	20%	34%	32%	46-50 ³

Reduction as compared to the predicted energy consumption 2020 and 2030

#mission 2030; reduction of PE intensity as compared to 2015 (PE consumption/GDP)
 Effort Sharing
 National sub target
 Source: Environment Agency Austria, 2019, p. 14

As the climate and energy policy framework conditions and challenges changed fundamentally just a short time after the Europe 2020 strategy had been adopted (among other

things, changes on the international energy markets, sensitivity towards dependency on energy imports), it was adjusted in October 2014, which has changed the national targets for the three target areas mentioned above, but also the national target path. The following reference points are primarily relevant for the adjustment of the targets:

In 2014, the heads of state and government agreed upon a reorientation of the European climate change and energy policy for the period between 2020 and 2030 (for the targets see Chart 5). (European Commission, 2014) Implementation is to be achieved through a combination of EU and national measures described in the national plans of the Member States.

The most recent of such national plans submitted to the European Commission was the Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP 2019). Therein, Austria has set out the national measures in the fields of GHG reduction, renewable energy and energy efficiency in accordance with the targets of the European Union. (BMNT, 2019)

In addition, the Austrian federal government worked out the Austrian Climate and Energy Strategy #mission2030 in 2018 as a foundation for the intended transformation of economy and society. (BMNT/BMVIT, 2018)

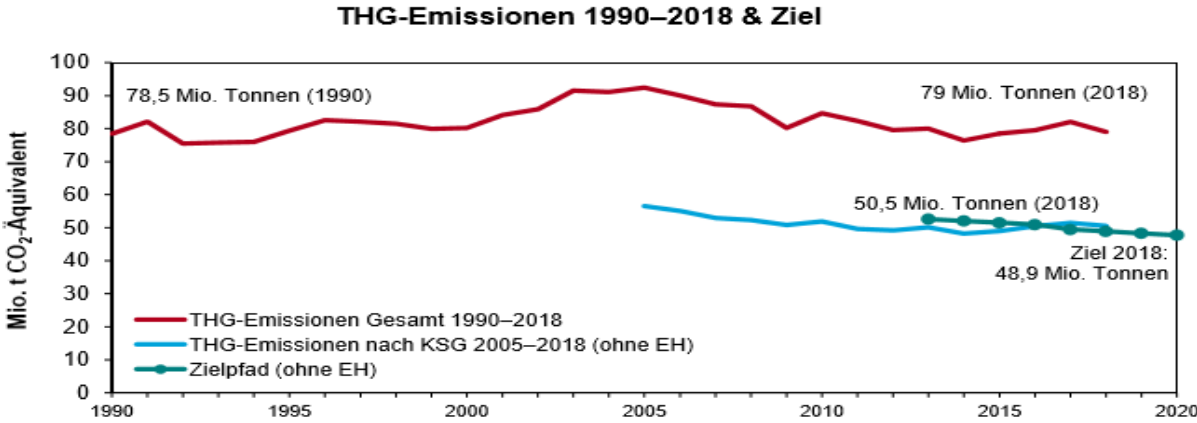
4.3.1 Greenhouse gas emissions

According to the Europe 2020 strategy, the national target for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in non-ETS sectors amounts to -16% compared to 2005. Austria was able to meet or exceed the annual targets from 2013 to 2016 but in 2017 and 2018 the emissions were above the targets stipulated by EU law. In the country report, the European Commission points out that Austria will fail to achieve its Europe 2020 emissions reduction target in the sectors not included in the ETS and identifies the increase of emissions in the transport sector as one of the causes. Accordingly, it expects that Austria misses the target by more than 2% in 2020. (European Commission, 2020a, p. 61)

The EU Effort Sharing Decision and implementing decisions of the European Commission issued on the basis of the decision provide for caps on greenhouse gas emissions for those sectors not included in the emissions trading system. (Official Journal of the European Union, 2018a) In Austria, the caps are allocated to individual sectors by the Austrian Climate Change Act (Klimaschutzgesetz, KSG). (Federal Law Gazette I No. 106/2011 as amended) The national target for 2018 was set at 48.9 million tons carbon equivalent for the non-ETS

sector (see cyan-coloured line in Chart 6), the actual emissions in Austria reached approx. 50.5 million tons carbon equivalent (see blue line in Chart 6) and thus exceeded the target value by approx. 1.6 million tons.

Chart 5: Greenhouse gas emissions 1990-2018, total and pursuant to the Climate Change Act (KSG)



Source: Environment Agency Austria 2020

Regarding the total of greenhouse gas emissions in Austria, Chart 6 (see red line) shows that some 79 million tons carbon equivalent were emitted in 2018. This is a decrease of approx. 3.7% as compared to 2017. (Environment Agency Austria 2020) As in previous years, the energy and industry sector (including and excluding ETS) was the largest emitter of greenhouse gases in Austria in 2018. However, the emissions in this sector have decreased by 6.4% and 3.3% as compared to 2017 (Environment Agency Austria 2020).

Table 4: Greenhouse gas emissions in Austria 2005-2018

Million tons of carbon equivalent	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2017-/18
Energy & industry including ETS	41.9	39.2	39.0	36.8	36.1	33.8	35.2	34.8	36.6	34.3	-6.4%
Energy & industry excluding ETS*	6.1	6.5	6.3	6.5	6.2	5.7	5.7	5.8	6.1	5.9	-3.3%
Energy & industry ETS**	35.8	32.7	32.6	30.	29.9	28.1	29.5	29.0	30.6	28.4	-7.0%

Million tons of carbon equivalent	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2017- /18
Transport (including national aviation)	24.7	22.2	21.5	21.4	22.4	21.8	22.2	23.1	23.8	23.9	+0.7%
Transport (excluding national aviation)	24.6	22.2	21.4	21.3	22.4	21.8	22.2	23.1	23.7	23.9	+0.7%
Buildings*	12.6	10.2	8.9	8.8	8.8	7.7	8.2	8.4	8.6	7.9	-8.3%
Agriculture*	8.1	8.1	8.2	8.0	8.0	8.2	8.2	8.4	8.3	8.2	-1.2%
Waste management*	3.3	3.1	3.0	3.0	2.8	2.8	2.8	2.8	2.6	2.5	-4.7%
F gases (including NF3)	1.8	1.9	1.8	1.9	1.9	2.0	2.0	2.1	2.2	2.3	+2.7%
F gases (excluding NF3)	1.8	1.9	1.8	1.9	1.9	2.0	2.0	2.1	2.2	2.2	+2.5%
Greenhouse gases under KSG	56.6	51.9	49.7	49.2	50.1	48.2	49.0	50.5	51.5	50.5	-1.8%
Total GHG	92.4	84.7	82.3	79.8	80.0	76.4	78.6	79.5	82.1	79.0	-3.7

*Sector classification pursuant to Climate Change Act (KSG)

**Data for the period between 2005 and 2012 adjusted for the differentiation in emissions trading applicable since 2013

Current emission data deviate from previously published time series.

Source: Environment Agency Austria 2020, data as of 2020

Emissions are also decreasing in the housing sector, in agriculture and in the waste management sector. However, the transport sector, which emitted approx. 23.9 million tons carbon equivalent in 2018, sees an increase in emissions. Compared to 2017, this constitutes an increase by 0.7% (+0.16 million tons of carbon equivalent). In 2018, 2.3 tons carbon equivalent of fluorinated gases were emitted in Austria; this represents an increase by 2.7% or 0.1 million tons of carbon equivalent as compared to 2017.

Within the scope of the Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP), first measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions have already been implemented. Since 1 January 2020, the installation of oil-fired boilers in new builds has been prohibited. (Federal Law Gazette I No. 6/2020) Furthermore, as from 2021, renewable energy sources are to be used when replacing existing oil-fired heating systems and as from 2025, the aim is to phase out fossil oil-fired heating if the boilers used are older than 25 years. Regarding the accompanying tax

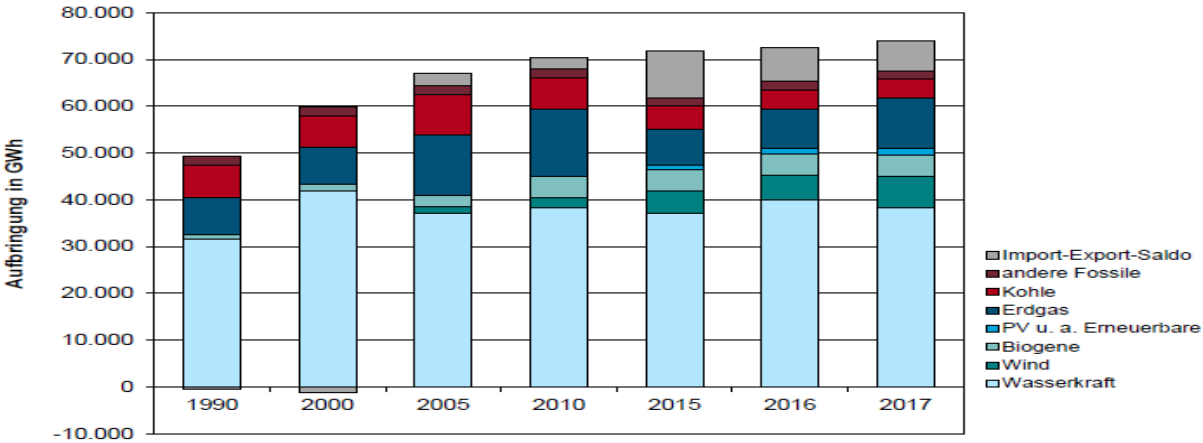
measures, reference is made to 3.2.1. At the time this report is submitted, it is to be assumed that Austria can meet the climate targets for 2020 by making use of the flexibilities of the Effort Sharing Decision.

4.3.2 Renewable energy sources

Pursuant to the Europe 2020 targets, Austria’s share of renewable energy sources in gross final energy consumption is targeted to amount to 34% in 2020. The current share of renewable energy sources in gross final energy consumption amounts to some 33,4% thus being only slightly below the national target. (Eurostat, 2020e)

Accounting for slightly more than half of the energy procured within the scope of power generation, hydropower is the most important energy source followed by wind power accounting for some 10%. With a share of 2% and 3%, respectively, photovoltaics and wood-based biomass play a small role in Austria’s electricity supply, however, in 2017 the entire renewable electricity covered almost 70% of Austria’s electricity consumption (Environment Agency Austria 2019, p. 140-142, Statistics Austria, Energy Balance 2017).

Chart 6: Development of Austria’s electricity supply from energy supply companies and industrial self-producers of electricity



Source: Environment Agency Austria 2019

Important investment incentives in the field of renewable energy were provided by way of the amendment of the Green Electricity Act (Ökostromgesetz) which was adopted by the National Council in September 2019. Within the scope of the amendment of the Green Electricity Act, among other things, EUR 36 million per year, for the period between 2020 and

2022, have been earmarked for the expansion of the photovoltaics sector. Funding for medium-sized hydropower plants was increased by EUR 30 million and the existing waiting lists for wind turbines and small-sized hydropower plants can finally be removed in their entirety. (Federal Law Gazette I No. 97/2019)

With a share of 56%, bioenergy (energy gained from solid, liquid or gaseous biomass) is the leading renewable energy source in Austria as far as gross inland energy consumption is concerned. It is followed by hydropower, with a share of 33% (Statistics Austria, Energy Balance 2017). Renewable energy sources play an important role also when it comes to providing heat. In this context, too, biomass covers the biggest share. In addition to heat and electricity generation, renewable energy sources are also used as biofuel.

The federal government's current goal related to the expansion of renewable energy sources is to achieve a net increase in generation output of 27 TWh by 2030. In this context, the Renewable Energy Expansion Act (Erneuerbaren-Ausbau-Gesetz) is planned which is meant to ensure that by 2030 100% of Austria's energy supply is covered by green electricity (nationwide, in energy balance terms). To ensure the sector's planning security for the transition to 100% electricity from renewable energy sources (nationwide, in energy balance terms) until 2030, the respective law bill will be submitted to review already before summer and is envisaged to enter into force in early 2021. Within the scope of reorienting climate policy beyond the Europe 2020 strategy, the goal of the federal government is to raise the share of renewables (nationwide, in energy balance terms) in final electricity consumption to 100% by 2030 and the share of renewables in the total gross final energy consumption to 46%-50% by 2030. In any case, the expansion of renewable energy sources and energy efficiency is meant to enable achieving the target of zero net emissions by 2040. (BMNT 2019) (See also Chart 5)

4.3.3 Energy efficiency

In accordance with the Europe 2020 strategy, the goal is to increase energy efficiency in such way that Austria's final energy consumption will not exceed 25.1 Mtoe or 1,050 petajoule (energy efficiency target value) by 2020.

However, in 2018 Austria's final energy consumption amounted to 27.9 Mtoe, a value significant higher than targeted. (Eurostat, 2020j) In its country report, the European Commission does not provide a forecast for reaching the national energy efficiency target in 2020. Although, it does point out that increasing energy efficiency and the share of renewables

would strengthen Austria's sustainable growth potential. (European Commission, 2020a, p. 4) In the past years, final energy consumption saw a slight increase and in 2017 reached the highest level so far: 28.6 Mtoe. (Eurostat, 2020j) Over the time period since 2010 regular fluctuations depending on market conditions have been observed (Environment Agency Austria, 2019, p. 137-139).

With an energy output of 2,568 GWh/a or energy efficiency measures with an output of around 3,161 GWh/a, the projects supported in the period between 2014 and 2018 within the scope of the Domestic Environmental Support scheme, including the renovation initiative, are making a vital contribution towards achieving the Europe 2020 targets. These projects, with a total investment volume of EUR 4,625.68 million were supported with a budget in the total amount of EUR 573.11 million (data from the Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology (BMK)).

The federal government, too, considers energy efficiency a key step towards climate protection and emissions reduction. Against this backdrop, a large number of action measures for improving energy efficiency was defined for the current legislative period. The focus, in this context, is on amending the Energy Efficiency Act (Energieeffizienzgesetz) (Federal Government, 2020, p. 113) but also on the construction and housing sector with regard to which country-wide incentives are about to be provided via the fiscal equalisation instrument (Federal Government, 2020, p. 41).

In addition to the Europe 2020 targets on energy efficiency, the EU target pursuant to the Energy Efficiency Directive (2018/2002/EU) is to improve energy efficiency by at least 32.5% by 2030. For Austria, the #mission2030 and/or the final NECP set out a target corridor to improve primary energy intensity by 25-30% (as compared to 2015) by 2030. (See also chart 5)

4.4 Education

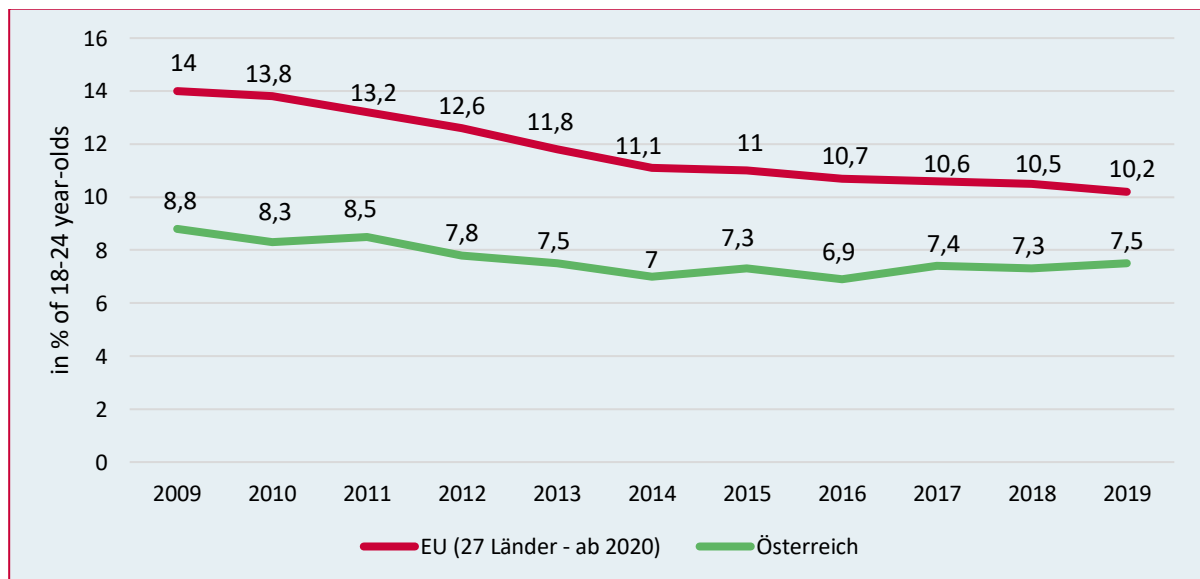
The Europe 2020 strategy defines two strategic targets for education to be reached by 2020: on the one hand, the rate of early school leavers is to be pushed to below 10%, and on the other hand, the rate of 30-34 year-olds having completed higher education or an equivalent (starting with level 5 in accordance with ISCED 11) education is to be raised to at least 40%. These targets serve as the common frame of reference at EU level. Corresponding national

targets were set by the Member States in a bid to use education as leverage for growth, employment, democratic societies and equal opportunities.

4.4.1 Preventing early leaving from education and training

The national Europe 2020 target with respect to early school leaving stipulates that the rate of 18-24 year-olds not having completed upper secondary education and not undergoing any other training must not exceed 9.5%. Encouragingly, the rate of early leavers from education and training has been on a significant decline, both in Europe and in Austria. According to preliminary figures for 2019, the percentage amounts to 7.5% in Austria, and to 10.2% in the EU-27 average. (Eurostat, 2020f) With this score, Austria performs well with regard to an indicator of the Social Scoreboard of the European Pillar of Social Rights in the category equal opportunities and access to the labour market.²⁴

Chart 7: Early leavers from education and training 2009 to 2019



Source: Eurostat (2020a)

²⁴ European Commission 'The European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 principles' https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en, date: 26/02/2020

A key instrument in this respect is the National Strategy for Preventing Early Leaving from Education and Training (Nationale Strategie zur Verhinderung von frühzeitigem (Aus-)Bildungsabbruch), which was launched as early as 2012 and updated in 2016. The strategy was based on work carried out by the OECD and on EU proposals.²⁵ The three-pronged approach to prevention, intervention and compensation provided valuable input for reviewing the impact and effectiveness of the measures implemented so far. (European Commission, 2013) As the subsequent costs of early leaving from education and training are disproportionately high for society, the focus in this context is on preventive measures. Tried and tested instruments of prevention include (i) stepping up language support, (ii) comprehensive measures for educational and vocational guidance at schools, and (iii) the use of better diagnostic tools.

In particular, (i) stepping up language support is of key importance considering that students are becoming a more and more heterogeneous group. (For actions on the above see 3.2.3) 40% of the children in Vienna's primary schools have a migrant background. Even though the education expenses of the Austrian government are slightly above EU average (4.8% as compared to 4.6% of GDP in 2017), attributing an appropriate funding to schools proves challenging due to the additional complexity related to the socioeconomic background of students and the teaching of non-German speaking students. (European Commission, 2020, p.45) The Government Programme acknowledges these challenges with regard to the attribution of funding by providing for a special support of schools with particular challenges. In this context, 100 schools from all over Austria will, on the basis of a chances and development index, be chosen for a respective pilot programme. For this purpose, schools are encouraged to describe their specific challenges, proposed solutions and financial requirements. Additional resources (personnel , financing) will be granted to selected schools on the basis of clear criteria. In the follow-up to the pilot programme, an assessment of need-based funding allocation is envisaged to be carried out based on the programme's results. (Federal Government, 2020, p. 295) The pilot project Expand Opportunities, Provide Possibilities (Chancen erweitern, Möglichkeiten eröffnen) which already exists in four schools is aimed at supporting, above all, schools with particular challenges. Another goal of the project is to reintegrate early leavers from education and training.²⁶

²⁵ <https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/Themen/schule/bef/schulabbruch.html> (available in German only), date: 05/03/2020

²⁶ <https://presse.vorarlberg.at/land/servlet/AttachmentServlet?action=show&id=40720> (available in German only), date: 06/03/2020

In the field of (ii) educational and vocational guidance at schools comprehensive measures are taken, aimed at supporting students in acquiring important life skills required for autonomously designing one's own career and educational path, so-called Career Management Skills. With a view to promoting dual education programmes, the federal government provides for all youths receiving support in their search for a high-quality apprenticeship. With this in mind, educational and vocational guidance is to be attributed higher importance already in school. There, youths shall be informed about the diversity of career opportunities already at an early stage of their education. (Federal Government, 2020, p. 300) Youth coaching (Jugendcoaching) has already proven a successful measure to be applied directly where there is an imminent danger of early school leaving. Targeted case management is used to assist students who are at risk of becoming early leavers or who lack orientation as to their educational career in finding an educational path that is right for them and continuing their education and training.²⁷ In addition, a closely meshed set of support, education and training offers is provided under the compulsory schooling or training scheme for young people under the age of 18 (AusBildung bis 18).²⁸ (see also 3.2.3)

In the field of (iii) the use of better diagnostic tools, the tool Individual Competence Measurement PLUS (individuelle Kompetenzmessung PLUS, iKM PLUS) is established which serves the diagnosis of the competence level reached and the support of each individual student. In addition, iKM PLUS is also a key tool for the development of teaching and schools as well as for quality development within the school system.

With a view to better recording the competence development of students, iKM PLUS will be launched as a pilot project in the 2020/21 school year and will likely be entirely implemented in all primary schools, new secondary schools and at the lower level of academic secondary schools (AHS) all over Austria.

School-based social workers assist schools in addressing challenges such as absenteeism. In this context, the Government Programme provides for a further increase in support staff (e.g. school social work, School Psychology Service, assistance, administrative personnel). (Federal Government, 2020, p. 205)

²⁷ <https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/Themen/schule/beratung/psus/jugendcoaching.html> (available in German only), date: 06/03/2020

²⁸ <https://ausbildungbis18.at/en/>, date: 06/03/2020

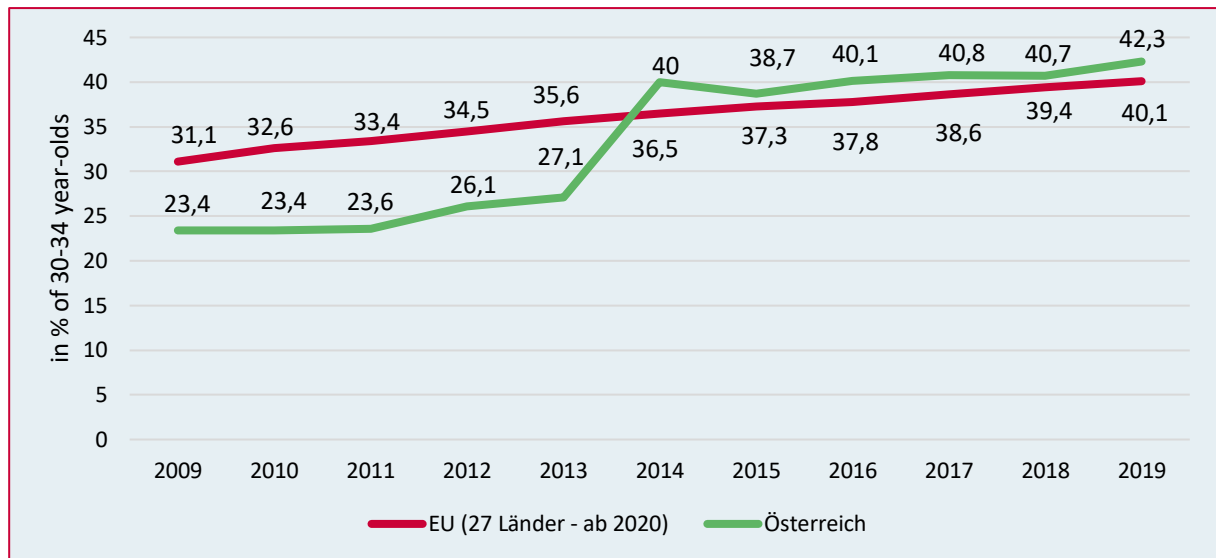
Relying on funding from the European Social Fund (ESF), Austria has also implemented numerous successful projects for the prevention of early school leaving and/or for providing qualification measures. The measures taken by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research within the scope of the ESF include the projects Transitional Classes (Übergangsstufe) - in the field of commercial and technical-commercial education, Promotion of German as the Language of Instruction in the Field of Commercial Education (Förderung der Unterrichtssprache Deutsch im Bereich des kaufmännischen Schulwesens) as well as Competence-oriented Autonomous Learning (Kompetenzorientiertes eigenverantwortliches Lernen, KOEL) being implemented in the school sector. The project You know something! (Du kannst was!) is meant to formally recognise already acquired professional skills and experience and offer the chance to obtain a vocational qualification.²⁹ In this context, the Government Programme considers securing existing national funds for educational measures a prerequisite for utilising ESF funding. (Federal Government, 2020, p. 302)

4.4.2 4.4.2 Tertiary educational attainment

In the EU, the rate of 30-34 year-olds having completed tertiary education has seen a continuous rise over the past few years, namely, for the EU-27, from 31.1% in 2009 to 40.1% in 2019. Austria, too, managed to catch up to the EU-27 average in the past few years, outperforming the national Europe 2020 target (of 38% of 30-34 year-olds having completed tertiary education until 2020) as early as in 2014. According to the preliminary data released by Eurostat for 2019, the tertiary educational attainment rate for the 30-34 age group is 42.3%, which means that Austria surpasses the EU average (2019: 40.1%) and has attained the education target already several years in a row. (Eurostat, 2020g)

²⁹ <https://www.esf.at/projekt/du-kannst-was/> (available in German only), date: 06/03/2020

Chart 8: Tertiary educational attainment in % for the age group 30-34 2009-2019



Source: (Eurostat, 2020g), break in time series in 2014 due to switch to ISCED 11

Various measures contribute towards making tertiary education in Austria more attractive. The funding earmarked for universities has been ramped up. Every three years, each of Austria's 22 public universities concludes performance-based funding agreements with the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Research (BMBWF). In total, some EUR 11 billion will be available for the performance-based funding agreement period from 2019 to 2021, which is tantamount to an increase of 13% as compared to the previous funding period (2016 to 2018). The New University Funding scheme (Universitätsfinanzierung NEU) puts the funding of universities on a new footing as from 2019, based on capacity and study programme parameters.³⁰ The core element, in this context, is the so-called three pillar model composed of the fields teaching, research and infrastructure. Hence, the funding received by universities in connection with their teaching activities will primarily be based on the number of active students, with active being understood here as taking the required minimum number of exams. Where research is concerned, funding will be allocated primarily based on staff numbers. Furthermore, competitive indicators will also be taken into ac-

³⁰ <https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/Themen/Hochschule-und-Universitaet/Hochschulgovernance/Steuerungsinstrumente/Leistungsvereinbarungen.html> (available in German only), date: 05/03/2020

count for the allocation of funds: raising of third-party funding, structured doctoral programmes, number of graduates, and especially active students.³¹ This reorientation of university funding makes the allocation of funds transparent and verifiable, while also channelling efforts into raising the number of scientific staff at universities.

Starting in the 2019/20 winter semester, the continued expansion of existing admission regulations for overcrowded study programmes is to result in better teacher-student ratios and raise the likelihood of students successfully completing their study programmes. Starting with the 2019/20 winter semester, an increase of places for university entrants was agreed with universities having admission regulations in place for the study programme Computer Science. At the same time, the social dimension of Austria's universities still has room for improvement. For example, students whose parents themselves completed upper secondary school are overrepresented. Students with a migrant background or students with disabilities are generally underrepresented.³² Against this backdrop, in 2017 a National Strategy on the Social Dimension of Higher Education was developed, the implementation of which is currently in progress. The most recent networking conference on the further development of the National Strategy on the Social Dimension of Higher Education took place only in December 2019.³³ Also projects such as Peer Mentoring at the University of Graz which offers support by mentors to so-called first generation students (students who are the first in their families to go to university) help promoting social diversity at universities.³⁴

Further capacity expansion in the universities of applied sciences segment will not only raise the number of places for students, but also enhance the portfolio of study programmes being offered in line with labour market demand. The current funding plan for universities of applied sciences provides for more than 3,000 additional places for students in the year

³¹ <https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/Themen/Hochschule-und-Universitaet/Hochschulgovernance/Steuerungsinstrumente/Universitaetsfinanzierung.html> (available in German only), date: 05/03/2020

³² <https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/Themen/Hochschule-und-Universitaet/Studium/Leitthemen/Soziale-Dimension.html> (available in German only) // <https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/en/Topics/Higher-education---universities/Studying/Key-topics/Social-dimension-.html>, date: 06/03/2020

³³ <https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/Themen/Hochschule-und-Universitaet/Studium/Leitthemen/Soziale-Dimension/%C3%9Cbergang-Schule-Hochschule-%E2%80%93-ein-neuralgischer-Punkt-f%C3%BCr-den-Bildungserfolg.html> (available in German only), date: 06/03/2020

³⁴ <https://www.uni-graz.at/en/studying-at-the-university-of-graz/for-prospective-students/getting-to-know-the-university/peer-mentoring/>, date: 06/03/2020

2024/25.³⁵ In addition, the STEM sector is to be expanded with particular focus being put on innovative fields of work such as industry 4.0, information technology, digitalisation, automation, artificial intelligence, cyber security and e-government.

4.5 Poverty and social exclusion

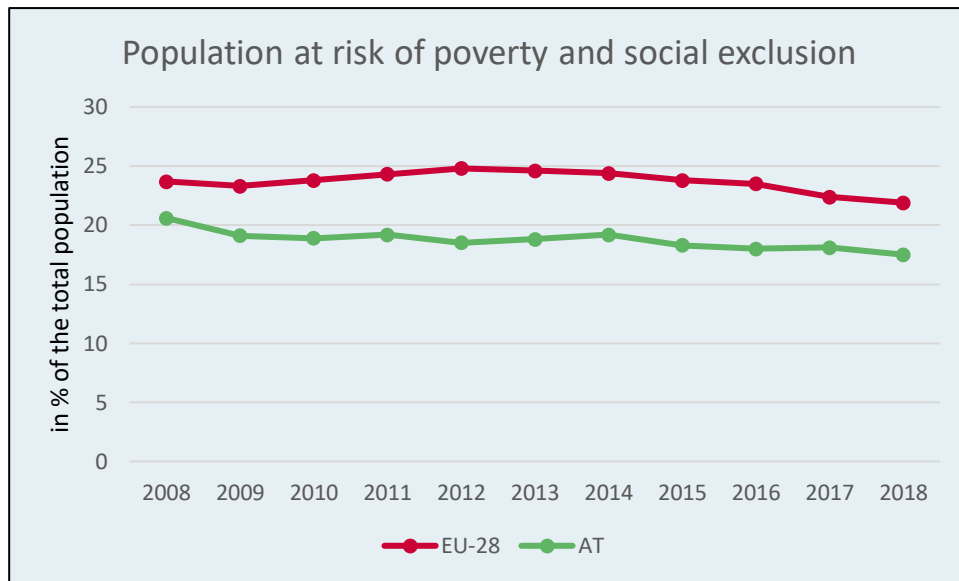
The Europe 2020 target concerning poverty and social exclusion stipulates a decrease in the number of persons at risk of poverty and social exclusion by 20 million persons (as compared to 2008) within the EU-28. Austria's national target, in this context, is to reduce the number of persons at risk of poverty and social exclusion by 235,000. A downward trajectory can be observed both at EU and national level. In Austria, the percentage of the total population at risk of poverty or social exclusion went down from 20.6% in 2008 to 17.5% in 2018. In absolute terms, this means that in 2018 some 187,000 fewer persons were affected by poverty and social exclusion than in 2008. (Statistics Austria, 2019c) Within the EU-28, the number of persons in risk of poverty and social exclusion decreased by some 7.2 million persons since 2008. (Eurostat, 2020h)

The Europe 2020 poverty target is based on an indicator which is attributed three groups of persons to which at least one of the following criteria applies: (i) poverty risks, (ii) no or very low work intensity, as well as (iii) severe material deprivation.³⁶

³⁵ <https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/Themen/Hochschule-und-Universitaet/Hochschulgovernance/Steuerungsinstrumente/FH-Entwicklungsplan.html> (available in German only), date: 05/03/2020

³⁶ Severe material deprivation is deemed to exist if at least four out of the nine following characteristics apply to a household: (1) having arrears on mortgage or rent payments, utility bills, or loan payments; (2) not being able to face unexpected expenses; not being able to afford (3) one week's annual holiday away from home, (4) heating to keep their home warm, (5) a meal including meat, chicken, fish (or a vegetarian equivalent) every second day, (6) a car, (7) a washing machine, (8) a colour television, (9) a phone (including mobile phones).

Chart 9: Poverty and social exclusion 2008-2018



Source: Eurostat, own chart (Eurostat 2020a)

According to data of EU-SILC (Statistics on Income and Living Conditions), 1,238,000 persons (14.3%) were at risk of poverty in 2018.³⁷ 480,000 persons (7.3% of persons under the age of 60)³⁸ lived in households with no or very low work intensity and 243,000 persons (2.8% of the total population) were affected by severe material deprivation (Statistics Austria, 2019c).

As the three above-mentioned criteria may also be met jointly, the number of persons at risk of poverty and social exclusion is lower than the sum of these three indicators appearing individually. Considering the individual population groups separately, it is evident that the long-term unemployed are significantly more often at risk of poverty and social exclusion (76% vs 17.5% of the total population). The risk of social exclusion is also higher for non-Austrian nationals: while about one-third of persons with the nationality of one of the EU-27, respectively the UK, is affected by social exclusion, the same applies to 46% of persons with non-EU nationality. 27% of persons who have only completed compulsory schooling are at risk of poverty or social exclusion, with said risk being much lower for persons with

³⁷ The term 'in risk of poverty' refers to persons whose equivalised net household income is below the poverty threshold of 60% of the median income. The median income for 2018 amounts to EUR 25,175 per year. This equals a poverty threshold of EUR 15,105 for a single-person household which is EUR 1,259 per month.

³⁸ Only persons aged between 0 and 59 years

an apprenticeship certificate or having completed a secondary school. (Statistics Austria, 2019c) (For measures taken in the education sector see 3.2.2, 3.2.3 and 4.4.1)

A study of the Vienna Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS) found that in Austria the risk of poverty is more than twice as high for persons with low-level qualifications than for highly qualified persons (Steiner, et al., 2018, p. 44). As a higher employment rate directly translates to a lower poverty rate, it is the federal government's declared goal to ensure that as many persons as possible are in a long-term employment relationship. Against this backdrop, the labour market goals of the AMS are aimed at sustainable unemployment reduction. (Federal Government, 2020, pp. 257 and 259) In addition, the Government Programme provides for a poverty reduction package meant, among other things, to expand active support (case management) (Federal Government, 2020, p. 235). On the basis of the Government Programme, the federal government plans to prepare a comprehensive action plan focused on poverty prevention to apply for the current legislative period.

44% of single-parent households and 28% of families with three or more children are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Amongst retired persons, above all female pensioners living alone, namely 29% of them, are affected while the rate of male pensioners living alone who are at risk of poverty or social exclusion amounts to 17% thus equalling the nationwide average. (Statistics Austria, 2019c) According to Statistics Austria, 372,000 children and young people were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2018. (Statistics Austria, 2019c) Hence, the risk of poverty and social exclusion for persons under the age of 20 amounted to 21%, thus exceeding the average risk of the total population. Therefore, the federal government intends to put a particular focus on low-income earners within the scope of the tax reform. A significant relief, in this context, will be achieved by the envisaged lowering of the starting rate for income tax from 25% to 20% on the one hand, and by increasing the lower limit for the family bonus from EUR 250 to EUR 350 per child (and the total amount from EUR 1,500 to EUR 1,750 per child) on the other hand (Federal Government, 2020, p. 235).

Austria has a well-functioning, closely meshed welfare system. This is also regularly confirmed by the European Commission, the OECD and the International Monetary Fund. (European Commission, 2020a; OECD, 2019) The European Commission acknowledges Austria's good results with regard to the European Pillar of Social Rights while also pointing out still existing challenges in connection with the employment situation of women and older workers. (European Commission, 2020a, p. 48) The recent Government Programme contains 20 principles reaching from equal opportunities and access to the labour market, through fair working conditions all the way to social protection and social inclusion, but also

specific measures, all aimed at increasing the employment rate of women and older workers. (See also 3.2.2 and 4.1)

5 ESI Funds: Coherence between funding priorities for 2014 to 2020 and national-level Europe 2020 targets and country-specific recommendations

In terms of content, Austria's ESI Funds programmes 2014-2020 are geared towards the objectives of EU cohesion policy (economic, social and territorial cohesion), the Common Agricultural and Fisheries Policy and the targets of the Europe 2020 strategy, that is smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

ESI Funds (excluding ETC) in the amount of some EUR 4.9 billion (at the respective current prices) are at Austria's disposal for the entire period between 2014 and 2020 (or the phasing-out period until 2023). As a prerequisite, these funds must be co-financed with national funds. The funds made available to Austria are composed of the EAFRD (approx. EUR 3.9 billion), the ERDF (appr. EUR 536 million), the ESF (approx. EUR 442 million) and the EMFF (approx. EUR 7 million). The above funds are supplemented by more than EUR 257 million from EFRE for Austria's participation in ETC/Interreg programmes concerning transnational, cross-border and interregional cooperation.

The EAFRD Programme can be considered Austria's key instrument in connection with agricultural and/or rural development policy. However, given their limited budgets, ERDF and ESF interventions cover only very specific segments of EU topics (which are also dealt with in the context of the national Europe 2020 targets). Against this backdrop, the measures taken in the context of the ESI Funds can (merely) contribute to attaining the national headline targets and their indicators, in line with the respective basic orientation of each of these funds. What needs to be mentioned in this context, in terms of reservation, is that those aspects which are the most relevant for reaching the set-out targets (e.g. regulation, competition policy, financial policy, social insurance and pension insurance schemes) are not situated in the fields directly affected by the ESI Funds interventions.

The 2019 progress report prepared pursuant to Article 52 of the Regulation (EU) 1303/2013 concluded that with a highly differentiated range of corresponding investment priorities

and focus areas, the ESI Funds make a contribution to all national Europe 2020 targets. For example, the key priorities of Austria's nationwide ERDF Regional Programme 2014–2020 are to strengthen research and development and the competitiveness of SMEs, and to increase energy efficiency and the entrepreneurial use of renewable energy sources. For its part, focusing on promoting long-term and high-quality employment, investing in education and lifelong learning, promoting long-term and high-quality employment, supporting the mobility of workers and promoting social integration and poverty reduction, the key aspects of the ESF Programme also correspond to the national Europe 2020 targets. Also, the (small by comparison) EMFF Programme (focused on developing market-oriented processing facilities and adapting the freshwater fisheries and aquaculture sector in terms of environmental impact and energy efficiency) as well as, in particular, the (large-scale) Austrian EAFRD Programme contribute towards reaching the targets. The interventions of the EAFRD Programme contribute, in particular, to reaching the emissions reduction target, to an increased use of renewable energy sources, to energy efficiency as well as to securing employment in rural areas (including promoting the expansion of broadband services and social service facilities such as childcare and caregiving). (ÖROK, 2019, p. 23)

Within the scope of the ongoing preparations of the 2021-2027 programme, the competent Austrian authorities will take into account the Country Report Austria 2019 (European Commission, 2019d) and/or the Investment Guidance on Cohesion Policy Funding 2021-2027 for Austria contained in Annex D thereof.

6 Institutional aspects

The National Reform Programme 2019 was adopted by the Austrian Council of Ministers on 24 April 2019 and submitted to the Austrian Parliament for deliberation in accordance with the rules of procedure. The Budget Committee deliberated on the National Reform Programme in a public session held on 26 June 2019 and acknowledged the Programme with a majority of the votes cast.

Within their respective areas of responsibility, the provincial and local governments contribute to reaching the national Europe 2020 targets and to implementing the country-specific recommendations. Collaboration between the various layers of government in early childhood education and the health sector is governed by so-called Article 15a agreements, which are used to regulate competences across the different levels of government. A key aspect of health-sector policy is to continue strengthening the sustainability of the healthcare system. By expanding the offer of high-quality formal childcare, the federal provinces contribute to the aim of improving women's labour market participation and overcoming educational disadvantages. Research and development, innovation, digitalisation and boosting competitiveness count among the central topics addressed at the regional level. The specific measures taken by the provincial governments to implement the country-specific recommendations and to attain Austria's national Europe 2020 targets are summarised in Annex 2, Table 1 and Table 2. While not exhaustive, this documentation does provide insights into the political strategies and measures at provincial level, especially in the areas of employment, education and improvement of basic skills of disadvantaged young people, energy and climate protection, R&D, and combating poverty.

All of these topics are closely related to the work of the Public Administration. This is why, Public Sector Innovation is an important prerequisite for successfully implementing the National Reform Programme. The Federal Ministry for Arts, Culture, the Civil Service and Sport (BMKÖS) (Division III - Civil service and administration innovation) is implementing numerous initiatives and developing tools to support Public Administration in catching up with the challenges of digitalisation, ecological sustainability and inclusion. The projects and activities of GovLabAustria (www.govlabaustria.gv.at, available in German only), a new innovation course, or the School of Data Public Services provide new impetus with regard to the innovation in the Austrian federal administration. The Austrian Administration Award

(Österreichischer Verwaltungspreis) (verwaltungspreis.gv.at) creates incentives for executives and employees of many future-oriented projects and promotes knowledge transfer across different authority levels. The quality management tool Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and the accompanying guidelines support administrative organisations in efficiently and effectively addressing a number of topics mentioned in the country report (ecological sustainability, inclusion, digitalisation, etc.). This way, a well-positioned Public Administration can contribute to implementing the country-specific recommendations.

The Austrian federal government is making every effort to implement the Europe 2020 strategy in close collaboration with all levels of government as well as with the social partners and other relevant interest groups. The joint contribution of the social partners to the National Reform Programme can be found in Annex 2, Table 3. This list of selected projects provides insights into the many activities being carried out to address a variety of issues and offer bespoke solutions.

The involvement of civil society in the Europe 2020 process falls within the competences of the various ministries in Austria. In accordance with Austria's standards for public involvement, efforts are being made to launch participation processes as early as possible in order to make appropriate use of the existing room for manoeuvre. In this field, too, ongoing digitalisation presents many opportunities of target- and target group-specific involvement. The BMKÖS is currently working on an adequate practical guide on the conception, implementation and evaluation of inclusive participation processes at federal, provincial and local level within the scope of a participatory process.³⁹ With regard to measures taken to combat poverty in connection with the Europe 2020 target, reference is made to the Austrian platform for the implementation of the national Europe 2020 target of combating poverty and social exclusion. This platform unites all major stakeholders and meets at least twice a year, thus ensuring a sustained dialogue between the parties involved. In the context of the #mission2030 Austrian Climate and Energy Strategy, several further stakeholder processes have been launched already in a bid to develop concrete implementation strategies.

³⁹ <https://www.oeffentlicherdienst.gv.at/verwaltungsinnovation/oeffentlichkeitsbeteiligung/index.html> (available in German only)

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