



***The changing face of motherhood in Western Europe:  
Austria***

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## Contents

<b>1.1 Austria</b> .....	<b>4</b>
1.1.1 Introduction .....	4
1.1.2 Historical perspectives .....	4
1.1.3 Demographics .....	5
1.1.4 Defining motherhood in the Austrian context .....	5
1.1.5 Motherhood and employment.....	5
1.1.6 Childcare.....	6
1.1.7 Values and popular representations .....	7
1.1.8 Motherhood and sport.....	7
<b>1.2 Austrian national survey</b> .....	<b>8</b>
1.2.1 Introduction .....	8
1.2.2 Current free time and 'me time' .....	8
1.2.3 Generational comparisons .....	9
1.2.4 Perceptions of change .....	9
1.2.5 Impact of economic downturn.....	10
1.2.6 Ideal decades.....	10
1.2.7 Labour saving devices and impact on time-use .....	11
1.2.8 Time with children.....	11
1.2.9 Help in the home.....	12
1.2.9.1 Childcare .....	12
1.2.9.2 Domestic work.....	12
1.2.10 Role of the father .....	13
1.2.11 Maternal Guilt .....	14
1.2.12 Maternal isolation .....	14
1.2.13 Support and advice.....	14
1.2.14 Improving the quality of life .....	15
1.2.15 Sport.....	15

## Table of Figures

Figure 1. 'Me time' in an average week .....	8
Figure 2. Free time compared to your own mother at the same life-stage.....	9
Figure 3. Differences between being a mother now and being a mother a generation ago.....	9
Figure 4. Effect of recent economic conditions .....	10
Figure 5. Ideal decade to be a mother .....	10
Figure 6. Ideal decade to be a mother by employment status .....	10
Figure 7. Extent to which labour saving devices have made life easier.....	11
Figure 8. How time freed up by labour saving devices is spent.....	11
Figure 9. How time freed up by labour saving devices is spent by age of youngest child.....	11
Figure 10. Active time spent with your child/ children in a day .....	12
Figure 11. Main source of help with childcare in the home .....	12
Figure 12. Help from your partner in the home during an average week .....	12
Figure 13. Help from your partner in the home during an average week by employment status .....	12
Figure 14. Involvement of father in childcare compared to previous generations .....	13
Figure 15. Involvement of father in childcare compared to previous generations .....	13
Figure 16. Reason for increase in father's involvement in childcare .....	13
Figure 17. Level of guilt about your paid work - home life balance.....	14
Figure 18. Feelings of isolation as a mother .....	14
Figure 19. Sources of advice on being a mother.....	14

Figure 20. Communicating with support network..... 14

Figure 21. Improving quality of life as a mother..... 15

Figure 22. Importance of sport for your child's development and well being..... 15

Figure 23. Satisfaction with amount of time available to enable your child to engage in sports activities ..... 16

Figure 24. Satisfaction with amount of time available to enable your child to engage in sports activities by employment status ..... 16

Figure 25. Factors that make children participating in sport relatively unimportant..... 16

## 1.1 Austria

### 1.1.1 Introduction

Motherhood in Austria has for a long time been characterised by the belief that a mother's domain is primarily the domestic one, and that it is the mother who is best placed to provide care for her children. While the use of extra-familial sources of childcare continues to be viewed with disapproval by some sections of Austrian society, there is evidence, however, of slow and steady change taking place. More women are entering the workforce, and a well established public childcare system allows women to exercise more choice in the way they structure their lives. Working part-time is a 'choice' made by many Austrian mothers in order to enable them to try to strike a balance between work and familial responsibilities.

In striking this balance, Austrian mothers attempt to meet both traditionalist and modern ideals of motherhood, sometimes at the cost of their own free time. Working mothers, for example, will often cut down on their personal time, rather than sacrifice time with their children when they return to work. Interestingly though, many women cite a perceived lack of recognition for their domestic responsibilities as a reason for returning to work, as opposed to financial factors. Despite the role of Austrian mothers being conceptualised in terms of responsibilities in the home, it appears that women do not feel valued for performing these duties and so seek fulfilment in other places, such as in the world of work.

### 1.1.2 Historical perspectives

The most significant change with regards to the role of the Austrian mother took place in the 18th century. A 'gendered' political landscape developed at this time which idealised mothers and tasked them with the spiritual and emotional well being of their children and husbands. The 18<sup>th</sup> Century also saw the 'discovery of childhood' - that is, childhood became an increasingly idealised and protected time of life among the upper and middle classes. In turn, this social shift augmented importance of the mother as a socialising force in the lives of children. Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi became the figurehead of the movement to promote the importance of childhood in German speaking Europe. He believed that the *Elementarziehung* (basic, essential, or elemental education) of a child took place between the age of 0 and 3 years. Pestalozzi suggested that this was a crucial stage in a child's life that would determine the rest of its future. He argued that mothers were therefore particularly

important in the children's development.<sup>1</sup> With this in mind, the Austrian *Urmutter* (archetypal mother) was a world-redeeming figure who had an organic and spiritual relationship with her children. Pestalozzi's ideal state was one based on the principle of all-uniting 'motherly love', not masculine rationalist legalism (or the rather cold, rational approach of the state). Within this ideal state, husbands would be subordinated to their wives. Despite the new value being placed on motherhood, however, Pestalozzi's vision still placed mothers in the domestic realm, where they would care for their family members and do little else. Even in this ideal case, women were barred from the public sphere – and in the reality of 18<sup>th</sup> century Austria the subordination of women was certainly the norm.<sup>2</sup>

Views on motherhood were to change substantially in Austria with the rise of National Socialism in the 20th century, and through the unification of Germany and Austria under Nazi rule. According to the Nazis, children were born to the Führer, not to the parents. In order to make bearing children more attractive, the Nazis introduced 'Mother's Day', child allowances, financial rewards for marriage and tax breaks for families with children. After the *Anschluss* (annexation) of Austria to the Nazi's realm of influence, all mothers were officially suspended from state employment in order to be able to fulfil their duty at the 'birth front' (*Geburtenfront*). Mothers were forced to remain in the home and dedicate themselves to family life. After children reached the age of 3, parents were forced to enrol them in state-run kindergartens and day care facilities. Once the children were more mature, they joined the infamous *Hitlerjugend* ('Hitler Youth') and the *Bund deutscher Mädel* ('BDM' or 'Union of German Girls'). While the *Hitlerjugend* suppressed individualism and emotions, and emphasised order and discipline, the BDM trained girls to believe that their one purpose in life was to have children to strengthen the German nation.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of their pro-natal rhetoric and propaganda, the Nazis undermined family life and mother-child relationships. This contradicted the longstanding Catholic influence within Austria, which focused on the importance of the role of the mother within the family, rather than for the state.

In keeping with this Catholic view, Austrian attitudes to motherhood since the Second World War are in many ways rooted in 18th century family ideals. Austrian birth rates after World War II initially rose in comparison to the war years, but then fell from the 1960s onwards to the

<sup>1</sup> Schierl, Kerstin (2009) *Die Rolle der Frau in der Gesellschaft Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts und ihr Einfluss auf die Entwicklung der Pflegeberufe*.

<sup>2</sup> Schierl, Kerstin (2009).

<sup>3</sup> 'Familienpolitik im Nationalsozialismus'  
<http://www.lerntippsammlung.de/Familienpolitik-im-Nationalsozialismus.html>

mid 70s. This was mostly a result of new family planning options such as the contraceptive pill, and women's increasing participation in the labour market. After a peak in the early 90s (1992 saw the highest birth rates in Austria in recent years)<sup>4</sup>, birth rates have remained relatively low. This trend comes hand in hand with mothers becoming more involved in the labour market, with higher standards of living and education, and with an increasingly competitive economic environment.

### 1.1.3 Demographics

Very recently, however, Austrian fertility rates have been on the rise. In 2007 the fertility rate was 1.38. By 2008 it had risen to 1.4, and is predicted to stabilise at around 1.5 in 2029 – though this is still far below the level of natural replacement. More than half of households in the country (65%) comprise of families. Households that do have children have an average of 1.7.<sup>5</sup> This marks a decrease from 1981 when families had an average of 1.9 children. It remains the case that most Austrian households are centred around a married couple.<sup>6</sup> Of all Austrian families, most are married couples with children. The remaining families are either cohabiting couples with children, single parent households or couples without children. The proportion of single parent families has remained stable at 13% from 1981 to 2007. Non-traditional family structures are on the increase, and in 2006 37% of all children in Austria, and 50% of all newborn babies that year, had been born out of wedlock. First time mothers are also getting older in Austria. The average age of a mother at first birth in 2008 was 28.1 years, which marked an increase of 1.1 years since 1999. In keeping with this figure, the average age of women when they first get married is also rising. In 1974, first time brides were on average 21.4 years old. This rose to 27.1 by 1999, and 28.9 in 2008.<sup>7</sup> An important contributing factor to this development has been the increasing length of time people spend in education, meaning they put off forming a family for longer.<sup>8</sup> Looking to Austria's youngest mothers, one finds that teenage motherhood remains relatively low. In 2008, 3.5% of all Austrian mothers were teenagers.

### 1.1.4 Defining motherhood in the Austrian context

In Austria, marriage is still a defining aspect of family life, with 73.6% of all families being based around a married couple in 2007. However, this is not the case for all families. For some families, for instance, there may be a period of cohabitation after the first child is born, followed

by marriage with the arrival of a second or third child. While it is seen as acceptable for childless couples to not be married, the probability that a couple will be married increases with the number of children that they have. In 2007, children under the age of three were present in a tenth of all families (9.4%). Out of all unmarried couples, 15.3% had a child younger than 3, while out of all married couples, 8.7% had a child the same age. This difference can on the one hand be seen to reflect the fact that younger generations of parents do not necessarily place as much emphasis on marriage, while also revealing that marriage is not seen as a crucial prerequisite to starting a family. Second and third born children are more likely to be born to married parents than firstborns.<sup>9</sup> Unmarried parents often become married, and it is not seen as problematic to have begun a family prior to matrimony. The Austrian government, however, has predicted a more definite decline in the prevalence of married family life. In the past, cohabiting unmarried couples were almost always seen as 'marriages on trial', that would result in marriage after a certain period. Nowadays, however, attitudes about the importance and role of marriage are changing, and couples are more likely to choose to remain unmarried for the duration of their relationship.<sup>10</sup>

Austria's relatively low birth rate, which is far from the natural replacement rate of 2.1, has led to the development of two major debates around the subject of family and motherhood. The first is concerned with fears over the decline of family life in Austria, and the second focuses on the right for women, and men for that matter, to choose a life without children. Some couples, be they married or unmarried, are simply choosing to not have children. A family consisting of two children, however, remains the ideal for many Austrians. In 2003, 64% of Austrian women considered two children to be the optimum number, while 17% wanted three children and 8% wanted either one child or four or more children. Only 2% of Austrian women thought it was ideal to have no children at all, revealing a distinct discrepancy between opinion and reality, where over 40% of couples are childless. Within the European context, Austria ranks low when it comes to desired number of children. Austrian men believe that 1.66 children is ideal, and for Austrian women the figure stands at 1.82. The European average, however, is 2.25 for men, and 2.26 for women.<sup>11</sup> It would seem that there are other pressures on Austrian parents which make it preferable to keep one's family size limited.

### 1.1.5 Motherhood and employment

It is common for mothers to be in some kind of formal employment in Austria, a trend which is widely accepted, and especially supported by younger generations. Some

<sup>4</sup> Statistik Austria:

[http://www.statistik.at/web\\_de/statistiken/bevoelkerung/geburten/index.html](http://www.statistik.at/web_de/statistiken/bevoelkerung/geburten/index.html)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Austrian Ministry for economy, family and youth. (<http://www.bmwfj.gv.at/Seiten/default.aspx>)

<sup>7</sup> Statistik Austria 2009b, 2008b: 29, see also BMSGK 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Rupp/Blossfeld 2008: 146.

<sup>9</sup> Austria: Data, figures, facts, 2011, Statistics Austria information management.

<sup>10</sup> Austrian Family report 1999-2009 [www.bmwfj.gv.at](http://www.bmwfj.gv.at) p. 13-14.

<sup>11</sup> Austrian Family report 1999-2009 [www.bmwfj.gv.at](http://www.bmwfj.gv.at) p. 40.

commentators believe that Austrian mothers going to work reflects a desire to earn one's own money and gain more independence,<sup>12</sup> especially after the duties of raising very small children have ended.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, it can be argued that mothers are not concerned with financial independence, but that moreover, they do not feel they receive recognition for their work within the domestic sphere and so are motivated to join the workforce in order to feel valued. A variety of factors increase the likelihood that a mother will be in employment. The greater the availability of an extended family network or institutional support, the older the youngest child in the family, and the higher the level of education attained by the mother, the more likely she is to work.<sup>14</sup>

The Austrian 'Generations and Gender Survey' found that when it came to deciding whether to have a family, women considered their work to be a very important factor. Almost 50% of women said that the decision to have a child (be it their first or subsequent ones), depended on her own work, whereas only 13% of men felt the same. This linkage that women drew between their work lives and decisions about whether to have more children reveals that it is for the most part women who have to interrupt their careers to raise a family, not men.<sup>15</sup>

One way that Austrian mothers can be seen to be balancing their career aspirations and family life is by starting their families later. Austrian women between the ages of 25-29 believe that the ideal age for having a first child is 24.1 years old, and that a woman should not be giving birth beyond the age of 42.3 years. The average age of a first time mother, however, is 28.1 years old. It can be argued that women now have higher professional expectations and career aspirations that take time to achieve, and so they delay beginning a family so that they can become established in the employment sector. Women giving birth over the age of 35 medically qualify as 'older mothers' because of the health risks involved, and are on the increase in Austria. In 1991, 7% of children had a mother who was older than 35 at the time of their birth. This rose to 14% in 2001, and 19% in 2008. Not many women become mothers when they are 40 though, and this figure remains low at 3%.

Austrian couples are unlikely to observe a strict division of roles according to gender.<sup>16</sup> Despite some traditional aspects of Austrian life, such as marriage, still being valued, it seems that in general a traditionalist view on the roles of men and women does not remain.<sup>17</sup> Mothers are expected to join the workforce, and men are expected to

help with household chores. Gender specific roles exist to an extent though, as Austrian men are unlikely to adjust their working hours when they become fathers while mothers often combine part-time work with domestic responsibilities.<sup>18</sup> The general consensus is one of acceptance of working mothers. Eighty-four percent of 40-60 year old women, and eighty-six percent of women below the age of 40 agree with the statement that "children and work must not be separated – society ought to make it easier for women to combine the two".<sup>19</sup> Implicit in this statement is that while it is acceptable for mothers to join the workforce, there needs to be further provision for them to be able to balance the demands of family and work life.

A male-breadwinner model is more likely to exist among families with small children. Indeed, 63% of all families with at least one child under the age of 3 comprise a father who works full-time and a mother who stays at home and takes care of domestic responsibilities. The age of the youngest child in the family has a great influence whether the mother works or not. Only 10% of couples with small children (below the age of 3) both work full-time. This figure rises to 25% when their youngest child is between the age of 3 and 6 years old, and 50% when a couple's child has reached 6 years old.<sup>20</sup> Compared to the Nordic countries, Austria has a lower number of double income households, but does fare better than Germany or the Netherlands in this respect.<sup>21</sup> For the most part a mother's income acts to supplement the income of her husband, as she is more likely to work part-time. There is then a move away from the 'male breadwinner model', but this does not mean the majority of mothers are entering full-time work, rather that a 'father full-time, mother part-time' work model is dominant.<sup>22</sup>

### 1.1.6 Childcare

The Austrian government has made substantial provisions to make formal childcare available to families. Since 2007, the government invested heavily in the creation of additional after school clubs and kindergartens. Since 2009, there has been free kindergarten for all children, with plans to further increase provision.<sup>23</sup> In general, *kinderkrippen* (day nurseries) are available for 0-3 year olds, kindergartens for 3-5 year olds, and *horte* (school day care clubs) for 6-10 year olds. In the last decade, the number of *kinderkrippen* has increased by 110% and the number of *horte* by 60%. Kindergartens, on the other hand, have decreased in numbers, and provision is 16% lower than in 1998.

<sup>12</sup> Benard et al. 2004

<sup>13</sup> Wächter et al. 2006

<sup>14</sup> Neuwirth/Wernhart, 2007, 58.

<sup>15</sup> Austrian Family report 1999-2009 [www.bmwfi.gv.at](http://www.bmwfi.gv.at) p. 55.

<sup>16</sup> Schulz et al. 2005

<sup>17</sup> Beham/Haller 2005, Biffi 2008.

<sup>18</sup> Biffi 2008, Biffi et al. 2009.

<sup>19</sup> Picker/Zeglovits 2004, Picker et al. 2005.

<sup>20</sup> Austrian Family report 1999-2009 [www.bmwfi.gv.at](http://www.bmwfi.gv.at) p. 112-114.

<sup>21</sup> Austrian Family report 1999-2009 [www.bmwfi.gv.at](http://www.bmwfi.gv.at) p. 110.

<sup>22</sup> Pfau-Effinger 1998. Austrian Family report 1999-2009

[www.bmwfi.gv.at](http://www.bmwfi.gv.at) p. 115.

<sup>23</sup> Austrian Family report 1999-2009 [www.bmwfi.gv.at](http://www.bmwfi.gv.at) p. 88.

The Austrian government is pursuing measures to make public childcare institutions more accessible. A 2009 tax reform meant that parents can now spend 2,300 Euros tax-free on extra-familial childcare. Employers can also support the childcare needs of their employees by up to 450 Euros per child without being taxed. Along with the introduction of free kindergartens in 2009, the Austrian government aims to provide mothers with the opportunity to engage in part-time or full-time employment.

Men are becoming more active in taking on childcare responsibilities, but for the most part the distribution of family tasks happens along gendered lines. Despite it now being seen as widely acceptable for mothers to take on part-time work, it is unlikely that her partner will partake in the routine chores at home. For example, only 4% of men help their children with their homework.<sup>24</sup> Fathers are more likely to take care of family finances and the planning of family holidays, but overall mothers spend more time at home completing routine domestic responsibilities. Indeed, 86% of mothers reported that their domestic chores were a cause of stress for them. Daily duties concerning their children are less of a cause of stress for mothers, with a third saying they have never found child rearing or helping with school work stressful. It is moreover the housekeeping chores that mothers find is an unwanted pressure. Despite the uneven distribution of duties though, 65% of mothers say that they are 'very content' with the division of labour at home.<sup>25</sup> Fifty percent of young men and sixty-two percent of young women, however, are in favour of a completely equal distribution of household chores, suggesting that family dynamics may undergo further change in the future.<sup>26</sup>

### 1.1.7 Values and popular representations

The value placed on the classic nuclear family in Austria is a complex matter, as more children are being born out of wedlock, or some couples are choosing to remain childless.<sup>27</sup> There also exists an ongoing tension between Catholic influences which emphasise the importance of the family, and socialist attitudes which look to liberalise conceptions of motherhood and family life.<sup>28</sup> Despite this, 68% of Austrian women say that they can imagine themselves being as happy alone as they would be if they had a family.

The importance of a mother personally caring for her children is a belief that is widely held amongst Austrians. Seventy-two percent of the population think that a 'good' mother necessarily spends a lot of time with her children, especially when they are below the age of three. Sixty percent of Austrians think it is necessary for mothers to take care of their own well being, while eighteen percent

agreed that it was bad if a mother only considered the needs of her child.<sup>29</sup>

The meaning of marriage is changing in Austrian society, and is no longer necessarily needed to legitimate parenthood.<sup>30</sup> Only 45% of Austrians today think that couples who want to have children should get married. In 1988, this figure was around 70%. In 2008, 28% of Austrians said that they thought marriage was an out of date institution, whereas in 1990 only 11% thought so.<sup>31</sup> A trend is also emerging where a couple will get married following the birth of their first child. It is also the case that marriage will be less highly valued amongst groups of Austrians who are young, highly educated, secular or live in an urban environment. Having said this, married people are often judged more positively than singletons<sup>32</sup>, and marriage remains an expectation and a hope of many young Austrians.<sup>33</sup>

Looking to the Austrian mass media, one finds that less than 1% of factual television programmes are dedicated to family issues. Television series and films are dominated by urban settings and plot lines centred around young singletons, not stories about married family life. Indeed, the single, childless lifestyle appeals to some Austrians. The 'Austrian Population Policy Acceptance Study', conducted with people between the ages of 20 and 49, found that the main reasons for not wanting children were the lack of a steady partner, worries about the maintenance of their current living standard and worries that their own life would be less enjoyable with children.<sup>34</sup> The nuclear family may still be of central importance to Austrian culture, but lifestyles which diverge from this traditional model are becoming more prevalent and acceptable.

### 1.1.8 Motherhood and sport

Data revealing the attitudes that mothers have towards their children's sporting activities are sparse. There is, however, extensive information on how active young people are and how they perceive their physical health. Austrian youth is slightly above the EU average when it comes to youth participation in sports clubs: 38% of Austrian children and adolescents have participated in sports clubs while the EU average is at 34%.<sup>35</sup> Austrian boys are more physically active than Austrian girls with 11 year old boys spending 5 days a week being active for one hour or more and Austrian girls average about 4.5 days a week. The gap widens around the age of 13: Austrian boys

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Austrian Family report 1999-2009 [www.bmwfi.gv.at](http://www.bmwfi.gv.at) p. 54.

<sup>26</sup> Benard et al. 2004: 6.

<sup>27</sup> Austrian Family report 1999-2009 [www.bmwfi.gv.at](http://www.bmwfi.gv.at) p. 22.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Kapella/Rille-Pfeiffer 2007 and Austrian Family report 1999-2009 [www.bmwfi.gv.at](http://www.bmwfi.gv.at) p. 66.

<sup>30</sup> Amato 2007, Cherlin 2004, Fincham et al. 2007, Nave-Herz 2006, Wydick 2007

<sup>31</sup> Schulz/Hummer 2005: 350.

<sup>32</sup> Austrian Family report 1999-2009 [www.bmwfi.gv.at](http://www.bmwfi.gv.at) p. 63 and Schütz et al. 2007.

<sup>33</sup> Burkart 1997: 2008.

<sup>34</sup> Austrian Family report 1999-2009 [www.bmwfi.gv.at](http://www.bmwfi.gv.at) p. 41.

<sup>35</sup> Flash Eurobarometer 319a 'Youth on the move'

exercise for one hour or more for 4.7 days in a week while the girls average 3.9 days. By the age of 15 boys spend 3.9 days and girls 3.2 days a week doing one hour or more of physical exercise. While the Austrian 11 and 13 year olds are more active than the international average (at age 11 girls spend 3 days a week and boys 4.3 days doing an hour of exercise or more, by age 13 the average for girls has risen to 3.5 days, and boys remain at 4.3) this is not the case with the 15 year old cohort, Austrian girls are on par with the international average of 3.2 days, whereas boys are below the international average of 3.8 days a week.<sup>36</sup> This suggests that the older Austrian children are, the less inclined they are to engage in physical activity.<sup>37</sup>

The same applies to meeting the MVPA (moderate to vigorous physical activity) guidelines. Many Austrian teenagers do not manage to do so, with just 47.7% of girls and 57.4% of boys meeting the guidelines. By the age of 13, 33.8% of girls complete the recommended physical activity, and 52.3% of boys do. By that age 15 the rate stands at just 19.7% and 32.3% for girls and boys respectively.

In spite of their above-average amount of physical activity, Austrian boys and girls at age 11 are more dissatisfied with their body weight than the international average (girls: 27% boys: 21%). Twenty-eight percent of Austrian 11 year old girls thus consider themselves too fat or thin while twenty-four percent of the 11 year old Austrian boys feel the same way about themselves. This dissatisfaction remains high until the age of 15: 45% of 15 year old Austrian girls are dissatisfied with their weight and 26% of boys while the international average is 42% for girls and 20% for boys. This suggests that Austrian adolescents have unusually high standards concerning the way they look and remain relatively unhappy with their appearance throughout their early teens.

This discontent is surprising considering the relatively low numbers of overweight young people. At age 13, only 1.7% of boys are overweight and 0.9% of girls (international average: boys: 2.4%, girls: 1.2%). This changes at around the age of 15, when Austrian boys overtake the international average with regards to obesity. Just over 3% of Austrian 15 year old boys are overweight compared to an international average of 2.3%. 15 year old Austrian girls fare a lot better. Only 0.7% of them are overweight whereas the international average stands at 1.4%.<sup>38</sup>

## 1.2 Austrian national survey

### 1.2.1 Introduction

SIRC surveyed 505 Austrian mothers to examine a number of specific aspects of contemporary motherhood in Austria. The survey looked at the mothers' perceptions of their own roles and duties as a mother, as well as the part that friends and family play in their lives. The survey also looked to establish what the respondents valued as mothers, and the ways in which modern Austrian motherhood has changed when compared with previous generations.

The mothers we surveyed were aged 18 years and over, with 43% between the ages of 25 to 34 years and a further 39% aged 35 to 44 years. Most of the mothers have small families, with 54% having just one child. A further 36% of respondents have two children, 9% have three, and only 1% have four or more.

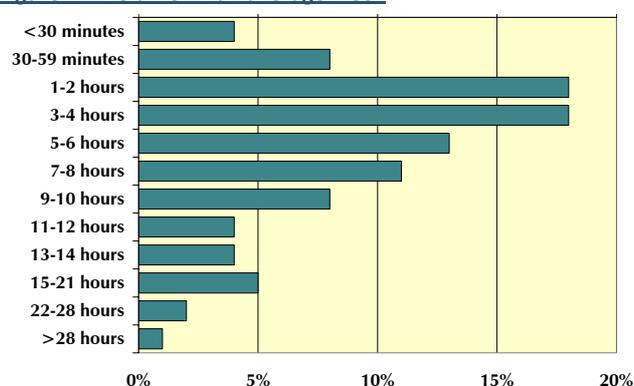
It is also the case that the majority of respondents in the sample have quite young children, with 42% of the mothers surveyed having a youngest child below the age of three years, and a further one-quarter (25%) who's last born is between is aged 4 to 7 years.

It is explained in section 1.1.5 of the background report, that there is an expectation in Austrian society that mothers will contribute to the family income. It often still women, however, who will take part-time work so that they can meet the demands made of them in the home while their partners continue in full-time work. This is reflected in the employment status of the mothers who answered our survey, with 43% working part-time, 28% full-time, and 29% not working in formal employment at all.

### 1.2.2 Current free time and 'me time'

Figure 1 shows the amount of 'me time' respondents thought they have in an average week.

Figure 1. 'Me time' in an average week



Austrian mothers fare well compared to the other countries in this study in terms of the amount of time they have to devote purely to themselves. Over one third (36%) of Austrian mothers reported having between 1 and 4

<sup>36</sup> Young people's health and health-related behaviour, WHO: Young people's health in context: Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study: international report from the 2001/2002 survey.

<sup>37</sup> WHO: (HBSC) study (<http://www.hbsc.org/>).

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

hours of me time in a normal week. When an average is taken across all of the responses, it can be seen that Austrian mothers have 6.29 hours of 'me time'.

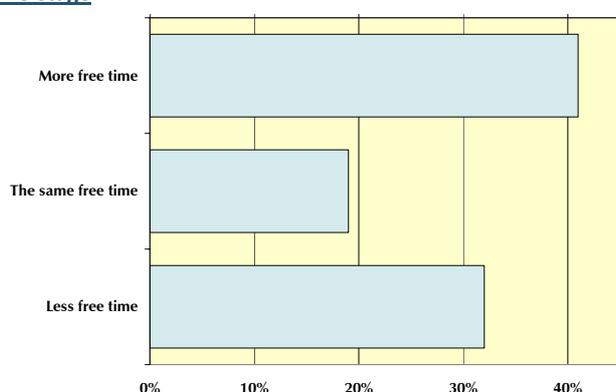
**The amount of 'me time' that Austrian mothers have in an average week is only superseded by mothers in Finland and Norway.**

This figure is only superseded by the amount of 'me time' enjoyed by mothers in Finland and Norway.

### 1.2.3 Generational comparisons

Figure 2 shows how Austrian mothers perceive the amount of free time they have in comparison to their own mothers when they were at the same life-stage.

**Figure 2. Free time compared to your own mother at the same life-stage**



In international comparison Austrian mothers are some of the most positive about how they fare in terms of free time when compared to previous generations. Only Finland and Switzerland have higher proportions of mothers that think they have more free time than their own mothers did. Opinion is somewhat divided though, despite the weight of responses asserting that mothers today have more free time than their own mothers did (21% say they now have 'a lot more' free time, whereas 20% think they have 'a little more' available). A further 19% of respondents reported that the amount of free time is 'about the same' in comparison to what their mothers had, while 11% think they have 'a little less' free time and 21% believe they now have 'very much less'.

The employment status of respondents is important in establishing a clearer picture of precisely which mothers believe they have more free time. Over a quarter (28%) of full-time working mothers said they have 'very much less' free time than their own mothers, as did 21% of part-time employed mothers, and 13% of mothers who did not work outside of the home. Looking to those who said they have 'very much more' free time, 28% of non-working mothers answered affirmatively, as did 19% of part-time working mothers and 16% of mothers with full-time jobs.

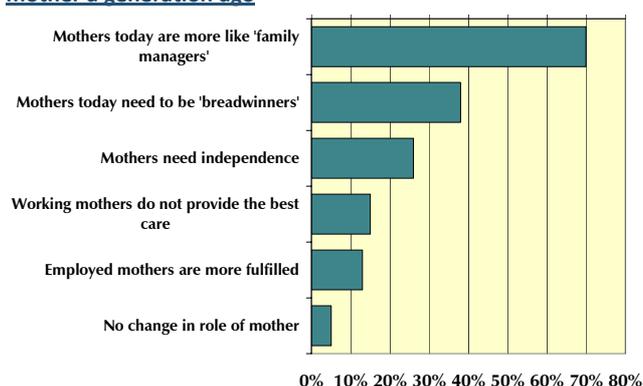
**Over a quarter (28%) of full-time working Austrian mothers think they have very much less free time than their own mothers did at the same life-stage.**

Although the variations between employment status are not substantial, it can be seen that full-time working mothers are more likely to believe they are worse off than their own mothers in terms of free time. As it is more likely that fewer mothers a generation ago would have been in formal employment, it can be suggested that the way in which mothers run households today is taking up less time, although some are finding themselves with less free time because they are also juggling the added burden of going out to work.

### 1.2.4 Perceptions of change

The study then looked to explore the ways in which the role of the mother in contemporary Austrian society has changed over the course of a generation, the results of which are illustrated in Figure 3 below.

**Figure 3. Differences between being a mother now and being a mother a generation ago**



The theme of mothers going out to work re-emerges here, with 38% saying that they believe mothers today feel the need to be 'breadwinners' much more than in their own mother's day. The most resonant agreement was with regards to the mother's role in the home. Nearly three-quarters (70%) of respondents said that they think mothers today need to be more like 'family managers' than traditional 'housewives'.

**The majority (70%) of Austrian respondents think that mothers today have to be much more like 'family managers' than the traditional 'housewives' of their own mother's generation.**

It seems then that attitudinal changes are being identified whereby there is a greater expectation for mothers to go out to work, but also an accompanying need for them to change how they operate within the home which allows them to balance the competing demands on their time.

In addition to running the household and having to earn money, there is a realisation among over one-quarter of

the respondents (26%) that modern mothers feel that they need the independence to pursue their own interests more than their own mother did.

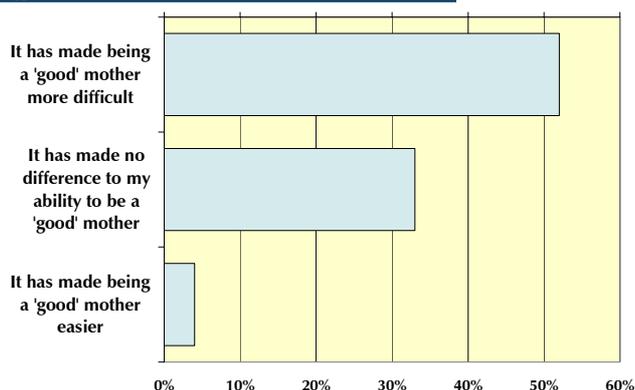
The responses indicate strong agreement with the notion that contemporary mothers should ‘manage’ the home, contribute to their families’ income, and also pursue activities that are separate to their roles as mothers. Only a small proportion of mothers (13%), however, were of the opinion that working mothers are generally more fulfilled.

As noted in section 1.1.1 some sections of Austrian society retain a more traditional attitude to motherhood and employment. This is evidenced further in the survey in which 15% of respondents said that mothers who go out to work are not able to provide the best care for their children. A further 5% said that the role of the mother in the average family has not changed significantly.

### 1.2.5 Impact of economic downturn

Figure 4 presents what our respondents perceive to have been the impact of the recent economic down turn on their abilities as a mother.

Figure 4. Effect of recent economic conditions

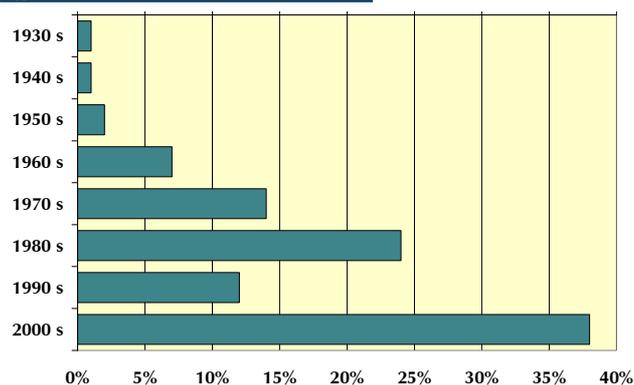


The majority (52%), reported that it is now more difficult to be a ‘good’ mother, with 29% of respondents saying it is now ‘much more’ difficult, and 23% saying it is ‘a little’ more difficult. A third (33%) of the mothers we surveyed did not think the recent economic conditions had made any difference to their mothering abilities, and 4% in fact reported that their lives were now either a ‘little easier’ (3%), or ‘much easier’ (1%).

### 1.2.6 Ideal decades

In spite of the majority of mothers saying that the recent economic downturn has made being a ‘good’ mother more difficult, 38% of respondents still cited the 2000s as the best decade in which to be a mother. The mothers we surveyed were asked which decade from the 1930s onwards they would like to return to if they were given a time machine; the results can be seen in Figure 5.

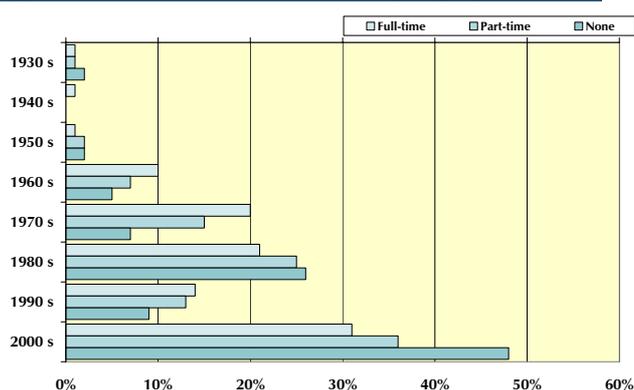
Figure 5. Ideal decade to be a mother



The 2000s then, is the most popular decade, after which 24% of mothers would return to the 1980s, 14% to the 1970s, 12% to the 1990s and 7% to the 1960s. The remaining decades received less than 5% of the share of responses each.

When the data are presented according to the employment status of the respondents, some more nuanced trends emerge, as can be seen in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Ideal decade to be a mother by employment status



The 2000s remained the most popular decade for mothers of all types of employment status, with 31% of full-time working mothers, 36% of part-timers, and 48% of those who are not in employment opting for the time period. Looking to those who chose the 1980s, 21% of full-time workers, 25% of part-time workers and 26% of non-workers fell within this group. It can be suggested that the 1980s was a boom period in terms of rising levels of employment, accompanied by rising levels of acceptability with regards to gender equality, making it a financially and ideologically appealing decade for many of our respondents.

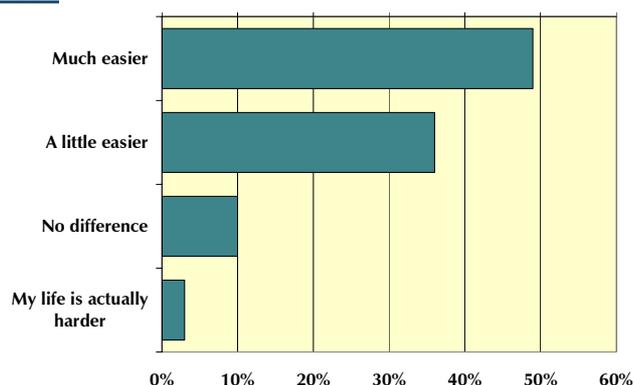
There is also a significant proportion of full-time working mothers who said that they would most like to return to the 1970s (20%). It is perhaps the case that working mothers would chose to return to the 1970s because it was a time of change when women were beginning to enter the work force in increasing numbers. It can also be suggested, however, that the share of full-time working mothers that would choose to return to the 1970s, and

indeed to the 1960s (10%), do so because these were years when perhaps they would not have felt obligated or pressured to work in the way that they do today, as it was yet to become normalised for mothers to do so.

### 1.2.7 Labour saving devices and impact on time-use

Figure 7 shows the impact that labour saving devices have had on the lives of our respondents when compared to the lives of their own mothers and grandmothers.

**Figure 7. Extent to which labour saving devices have made life easier**



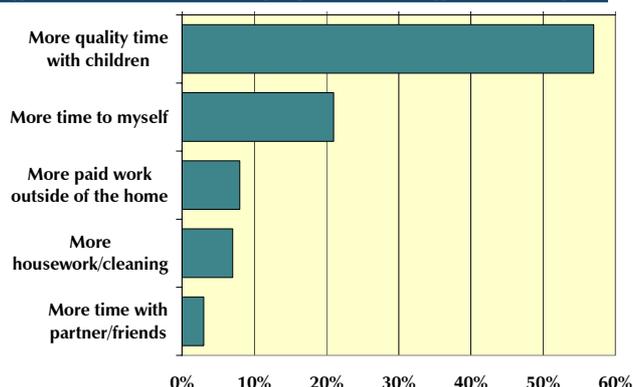
For 49% of respondents, life has been made ‘much easier’ by the new technologies available to them, while a further 36% thought life was now ‘a little easier’.

**The vast majority (85%) of Austrian mothers think that labour saving devices have made their lives as mothers easier.**

There is a small proportion of mothers who thought that new labour saving devices have made ‘no difference’ to their lives as mothers (10%), and in fact 3% of mothers said that their lives were now harder. For these mothers it is perhaps the case that additional pressures, those from work for example, come into play which may counter any benefits derived from the use of labour saving devices. A higher proportion of full-time working mothers (14%) said these devices made ‘no difference’ to their role as a mother than the overall share of respondents (10%).

Figure 8 shows how the respondents who felt they had benefitted from the presence of labour-saving devices opt to spend most of their ‘reclaimed’ time.

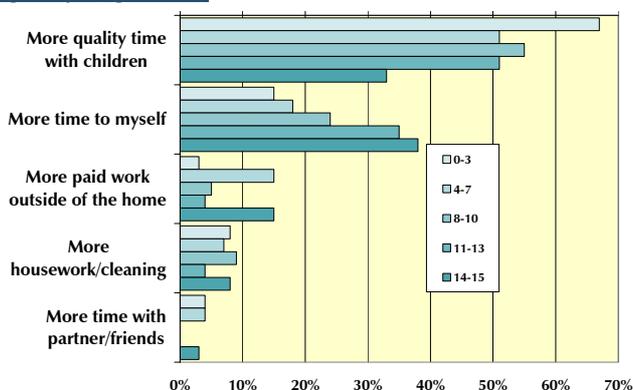
**Figure 8. How time freed up by labour saving devices is spent**



The majority (57%) choose to spend more quality time with their children, while 21% choose to spend more time on themselves. A significantly smaller proportion (8%) take on more paid work and fewer still (7%) do more housework. Only 3% of respondents choose to spend more time with their partner or their friends, which, along with Finland, is the lowest proportion in all of the countries in our survey.

Figure 9 shows how mothers choose to spend the time freed up by labour saving devices according to the age of their youngest child.

**Figure 9. How time freed up by labour saving devices is spent by age of youngest child**



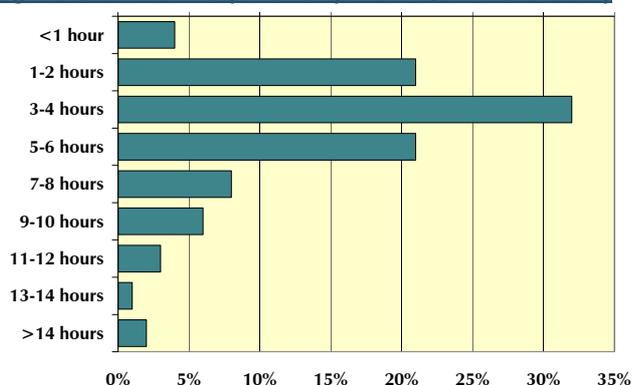
Comparing mothers who have very young children, with mothers who have teenage children, it can be seen that the desire or need to spend quality time with one’s children decreases as children get older and become more independent. Of the mothers whose youngest child is below the age of 3 years, 67% of them would spend most of their liberated time with their child/children compared with 33% of mothers with a youngest child aged 14 to 15 years who would choose to do the same. Looking to those who said they spend more time on themselves, 15% of mothers whose youngest is aged 0 to 3 were in this group compared with 38% of mothers whose youngest child was 14 or 15 years old.

### 1.2.8 Time with children

Figure 10 shows the responses from our mothers when they were asked to quantify how much ‘active time’ they

spent with their children in an average day. 'Active time' is defined as activities done with one's child such as reading, writing, washing, dressing or playing.

**Figure 10. Active time spent with your child/ children in a day**



Austrian mothers on average spend 4.8 hours of active time a day with their children, the second highest reported average from any of the countries involved in the pan-European study. This would reinforce findings from other surveys (see 1.1.7) in which nearly three-quarters of Austrians viewed spending large amounts of time with children, especially when the children are very young, as a key component of 'good' motherhood.

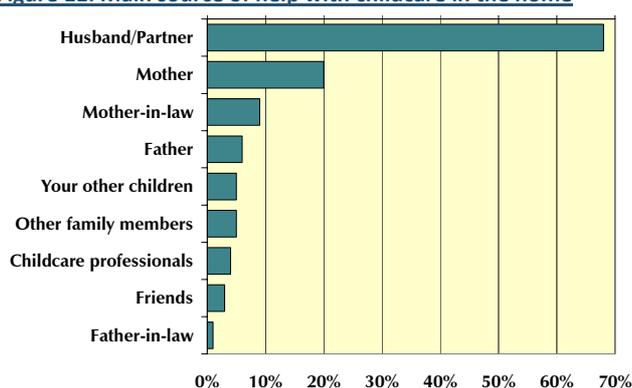
**Austrian mothers spend more 'active time' with their children in an average day than any of the other countries in the study.**

## 1.2.9 Help in the home

### 1.2.9.1 Childcare

Figure 11 presents the main sources from which our mothers receive help with childcare in the home.

**Figure 11. Main source of help with childcare in the home**



The majority (68%) of respondents say that their husband or partner is their main source of help with childcare.

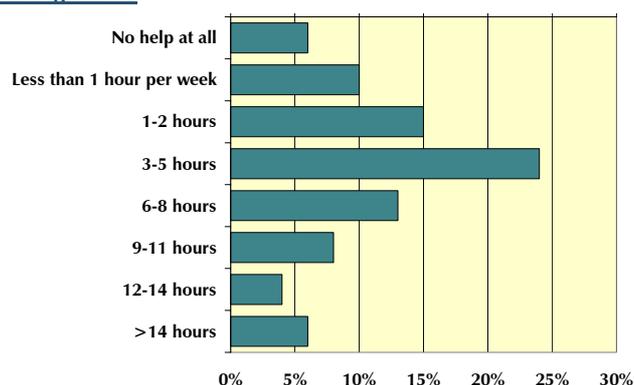
**The majority (68%) of Austrian mothers say that their husband or partner is their main source of help with childcare.**

A fifth of respondents (20%) said that their mother was their main source of help, whereas 9% cited their mother-in-law and 6% their father. The figures in Figure 11 confirm that most mothers are raising their children in a nuclear family set up within which they rely on their partner for help.

### 1.2.9.2 Domestic work

Looking more closely at the role played by mothers' partners, Figure 12 shows how much help our respondents said they receive in an average week from their partners.

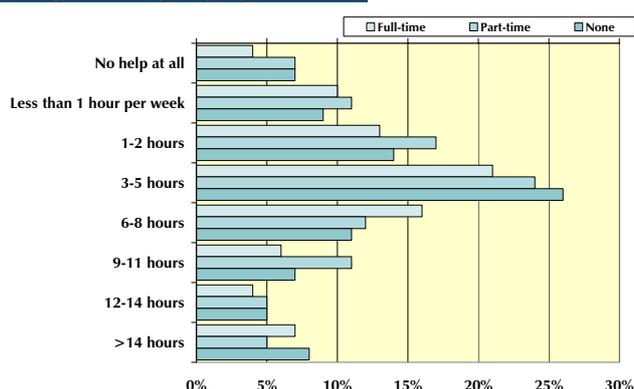
**Figure 12. Help from your partner in the home during an average week**



When an average is taken across all responses given, Austrian mothers receive 5.3 hours of help per week from their partners in the home. This represents a middling amount of help when compared to the other countries included in the study.

Figure 13 shows how the amount of help mothers receive relates to their employment status.

**Figure 13. Help from your partner in the home during an average week by employment status**



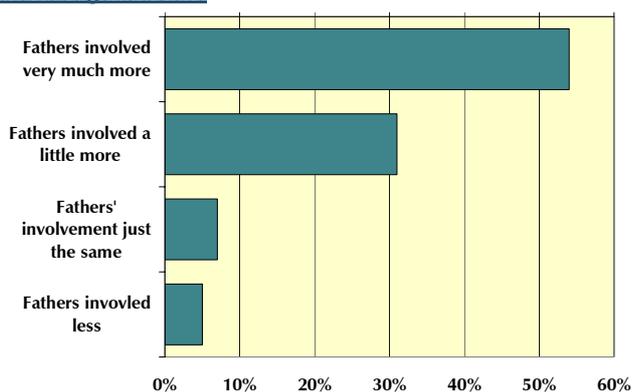
In section 0 of the background report, it is explained that strict gendered role divisions are not really observed any more in modern day Austria, and that men and women are expected to participate in work both in terms of formal employment and in terms of duties in the home. This may be the case, but it is interesting to note that in Figure 13 there exists no obvious correlation between the amount a mother works outside of the home, and the amount of

help she receives from her partner in the home. In fact, on average, non-working mothers receive 5.2 hours of help a week, full-time working mothers 5.1 hours and part-time working mothers 4.9 hours. Looking at the mothers who receive more than 6 hours a week of help, 31% of non-working mothers fall within this group, as do 33% of part-time employed mothers, and 33% of full-time working mothers. It may be the case that it has become socially normalised for men to help in the home, but it does not seem that amount of help given is adjusted according to the amount of formal work a woman is engaged in. It may be the case that working women, who receive similar amounts of help as their non-working counterparts, either do not do as much housework overall, employ some sort of professional help in the home, or find themselves working longer hours overall when work both outside and inside of the home is taken into account.

### 1.2.10 Role of the father

Figure 14 depicts how respondents perceive the role of the father has changed in terms of his involvement in childcare when compared with previous generations.

**Figure 14. Involvement of father in childcare compared to previous generations**



The vast majority of responses confirm that fathers are now more involved in childcare, with 54% saying that they are now ‘much more’ involved, and 31% that they are ‘a little more’ involved. Far fewer (7%) thought that the role of the father has stayed the same, and fewer still (5%) said that they have in fact become less directly involved in childcare.

When the data are broken down according to the employment status of the respondent (see Figure 15) the distribution of answers remains somewhat uniform regardless of the mother’s level of work.

A very similar proportion of all the different employment cohorts noted that fathers are now ‘much more directly involved in childcare’, for example, with 58% of full-time working mothers, 54% of those in part-time employment and 51% of non-working mothers agreeing with this statement. It can be seen that a slightly higher proportion of mothers who note increased levels of direct involvement from fathers are in full-time employment. It

can be suggested then, that mothers who have extra pressures on their time because they go out to work do receive additional help from their partners in the home to compensate for this fact. There is, however, a consensus that partners’ contributions to childcare have increased noticeably regardless of the mother’s employment status.

**Figure 15. Involvement of father in childcare compared to previous generations**

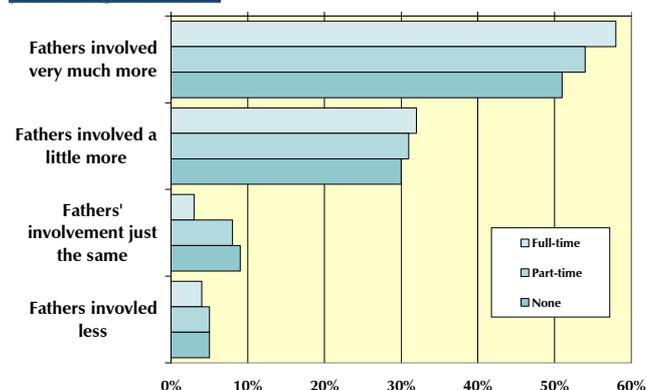
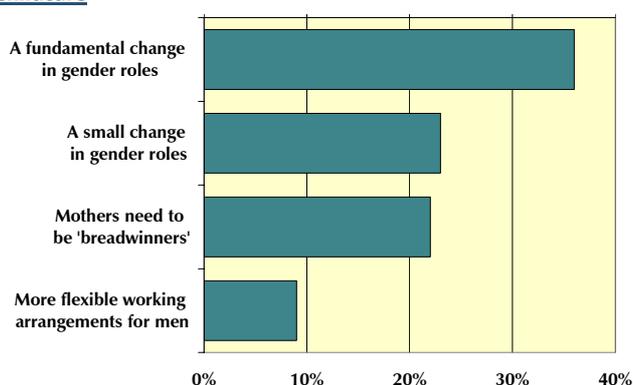


Figure 16 shows the reasons respondents gave for this increase in paternal involvement and confirms the idea that a shift in values has taken place.

**Figure 16. Reason for increase in father's involvement in childcare**



Over a third (36%) of the mothers surveyed said that they believe a ‘fundamental change’ in gender roles has led to an increase in father’s involvement in childcare, with a further 23% noting a ‘small change’ in gender roles.

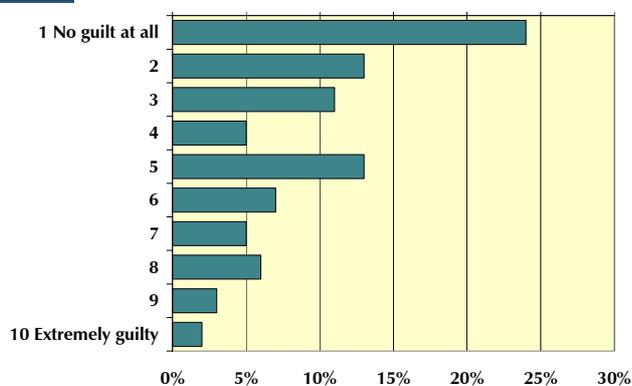
**Over half (59%) of Austrian mothers believe that a change in gender roles has taken place in society which means fathers are more actively involved in raising their children.**

Over one-fifth (22%) of the respondents were of the opinion that there is now an increasing requirement for women to be breadwinners, which has necessitated partners’ greater involvement in childcare. A further 9% of mothers felt that partners’ increasing contribution has been as a direct result of more flexible working arrangements for men.

### 1.2.11 Maternal Guilt

The study then looked to identify how guilty mothers felt about the balance they strike between their paid work and home life, the results of which are presented in Figure 17.

**Figure 17. Level of guilt about your paid work - home life balance**

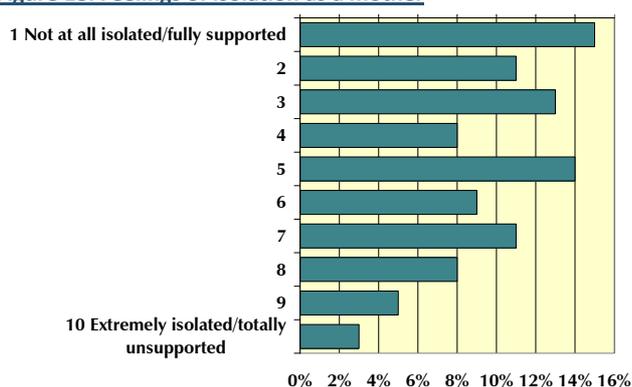


The most dominant response, cited by nearly one-quarter (24%) of the sample, is that Austrian mothers experience no guilt at all. A further 24% reported only moderate levels of guilt scoring themselves either 2 (13%) or 3 (11%) on the ten-point scale. In comparison with other countries in the European study, mothers in Austria experience relatively little guilt, scoring on average 3.8 out of 10. Only Swiss mothers reported feeling less guilty about the work and home life balance.

### 1.2.12 Maternal isolation

Austrian mothers may not feel very guilty when compared to other European countries, but they are quite typical in terms of the levels of isolation that they experience. Figure 18 depicts how the respondents to our survey assessed their level of isolation on a scale of 1 to 10.

**Figure 18. Feelings of isolation as a mother**

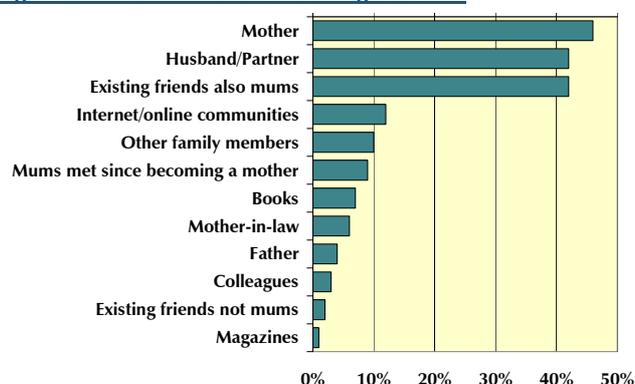


A substantial proportion (39%) of respondents registered feelings of isolation ranked at 3 or below, while 16% ranked their isolation at 8 or above, showing that at extreme ends of the scale, a greater proportion of Austrian mothers felt supported and not isolated. On average Austrian mothers ranked their feelings of isolation at 4.6 out of a possible 10.

### 1.2.13 Support and advice

The study, having established how supported mothers feel, then looked to explore the various sources of this support and who they most turn to for advice on being a mother (see Figure 19).

**Figure 19. Sources of advice on being a mother**

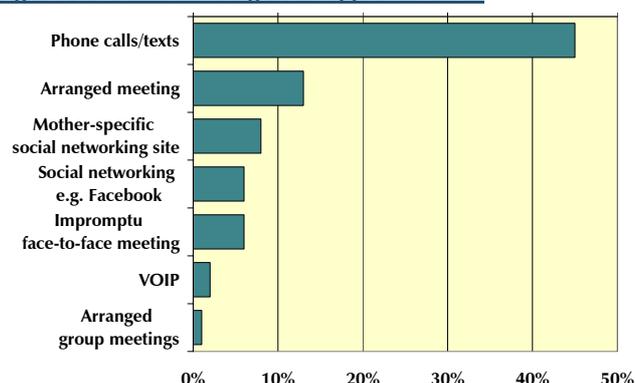


The most frequent response given was that those surveyed rely on their own mothers for advice (46%). This is true for a far higher proportion of mothers between the ages of 18 and 24 years, 72% of whom go to their mother for advice. The same is true for 58% of 25 to 34 year olds. It can be seen then, that mothers rely on their extended family for support most when they are relatively young (although 'other family members' is a response given by only 10% of mothers overall, and it is predominantly one's own mother that plays the key role of offering advice).

Following one's own mother, the next most popular responses from the mothers surveyed was that they turn to their husband or partner for advice (42%) and that they also rely heavily on existing friends who are mothers themselves (42%). Just over a tenth (12%) of respondents said that they make use of mother-specific online forums for insights and help with being a mother. Online advice is most popular among the younger generations of mothers with 19% of 18 to 24 year-olds and 20% of 25 to 34 year-olds reporting the use of these sources.

Figure 20 shows how mothers are most likely to communicate with their support networks in an average week.

**Figure 20. Communicating with support network**



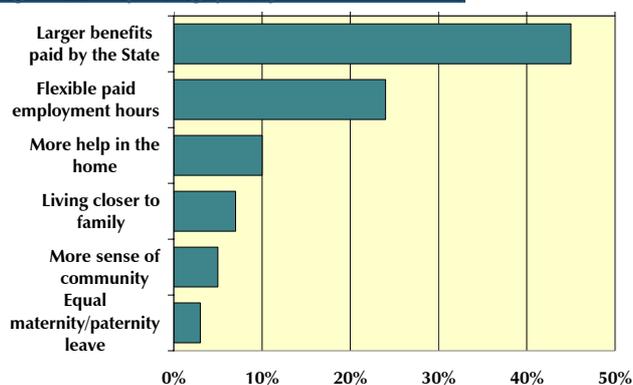
Face-to-face meetings are not a very likely form of communication between mothers and their support network. Instead, it can be seen that 45% of mothers choose to communicate, perhaps through sheer convenience, via phone calls and texts. For those who do report face-to-face contact with their support networks 13% arrange meetings while an additional 6% do so on an impromptu basis.

Modern technologies are again favoured by the younger cohorts. Overall, 8% of respondents say they use online networking sites that are aimed at mothers to communicate with their support network. It is the case though that 22% of the 18 to 24 year old cohort rely on these means.

### 1.2.14 Improving the quality of life

The Austrian mothers we surveyed were then asked to consider which of a number of factors might most improve their quality of life as a mother (see Figure 21).

Figure 21. Improving quality of life as a mother



The most frequent response was that Austrian mothers want to see larger benefits being provided by the state (45%). As stated in section 0 of the background report the Austrian government has, in recent years, been injecting considerable resources into supporting families and helping them cope more effectively with the financial burden of childcare. The responses seen in Figure 21, however, seem to suggest that the state still has some way to go in providing adequately for mothers. It may also be the case that the desire for greater state support may be heightened by the recent economic downturn; financial support being seen as the main means by which mothers lives could be improved.

For nearly one-quarter of the mothers surveyed (24%) more flexible working arrangements were felt to have the potential to provide the most substantial benefit. More help around the home is on the 'wish' list of an additional tenth of mothers with those in part-time employment feeling this to a greater degree than those mothers who work full-time or who are not currently in employment (14%, 6% and 7% respectively). There is perhaps an expectation that mothers who work part-time 'should' continue to do the lion share of the household chores and

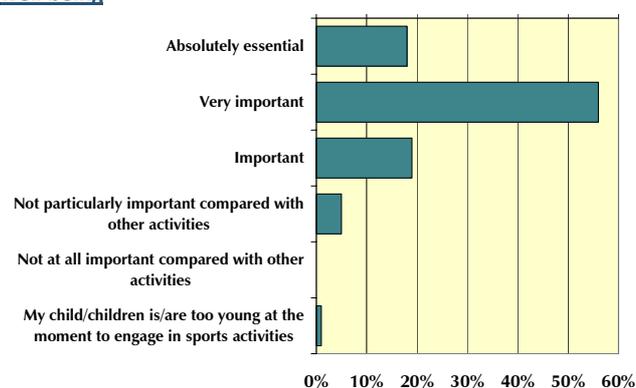
childcare while at the same time fulfilling their paid working commitments.

It is not the case for many mothers that they want a closer support network of friends and family around them. Only 7% say that they would like to live closer to family, and 5% would choose to have more of a sense of community.

### 1.2.15 Sport

The study then looked at the role sport played in the lives of Austrian mothers and their children. Figure 22 shows how important the respondents think it is for their children to participate in sports activities for the sake of their development and well being.

Figure 22. Importance of sport for your child's development and well being

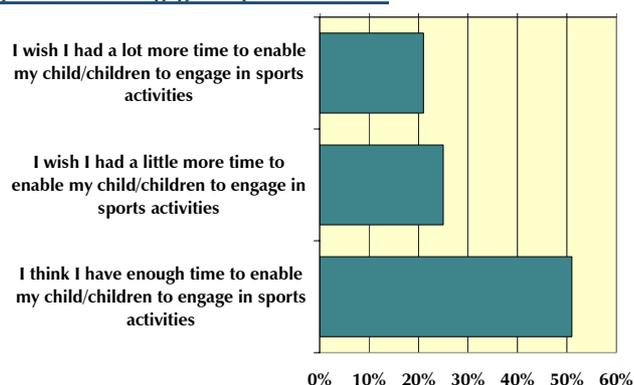


The overwhelming majority of mothers (93%) said that it is, to varying degrees, important for their child to participate in sports. Of these, 56% said it was 'very important' while 19% said that it was 'important' and 18% that it was 'absolutely essential'. Only 5% deemed sports participation to be 'not particularly important' for their child.

**The vast majority (93%) of Austrian mothers believe that it is important for their children to participate in sport for the sake of their development and well-being.**

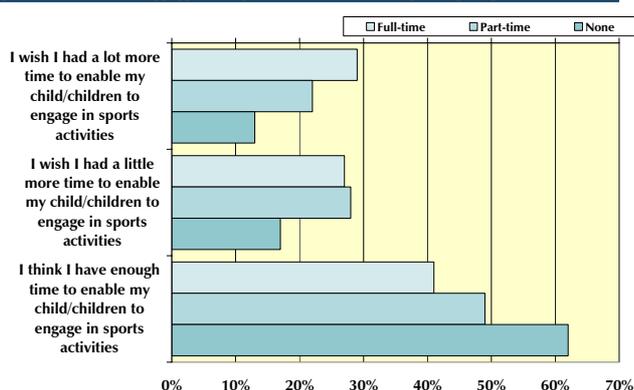
Just over half (51%) of the mothers surveyed were also satisfied with the amount of time they had available to help their child engage in sporting activities, as is shown in Figure 23.

**Figure 23. Satisfaction with amount of time available to enable your child to engage in sports activities**



It is the case, however, that 25% of respondents wish they had a ‘little more time’ available, and 21% wish they had ‘a lot more time’ available to help nurture their child’s participation in sports. There are some variations in the responses according to the employment status of the mother (see Figure 24). Mothers who are also engaged in paid work are, predictably, less likely to be satisfied with the amount of time they have available.

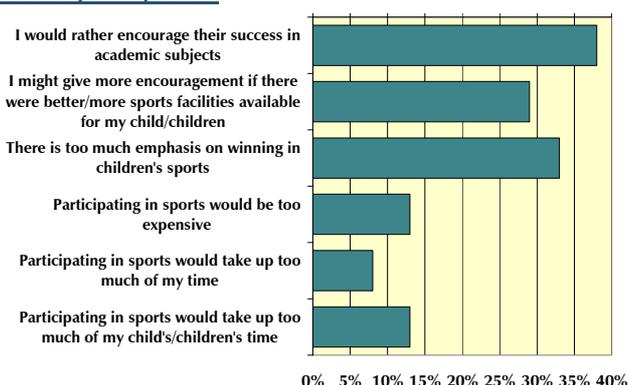
**Figure 24. Satisfaction with amount of time available to enable your child to engage in sports activities by employment status**



Nearly a third (29%) of full-time working mothers wish they had ‘a lot more time’, as do 22% of part-time working mothers. The same is only true of 13% of mothers who are not in employment. Nearly two thirds (62%) of non-working mothers, however, are content with the amount of time available to them, whereas only 49% of part-time working mothers and 41% of full-time working mothers subscribe to this opinion. The strain that working mothers are put under to strike a balance between their paid work and their home lives can be clearly seen here.

A supplementary question was posed to the small minority of mothers who considered sports participation to be relatively unimportant. This sought to explore their reasons for this position (Figure 25).

**Figure 25. Factors that make children participating in sport relatively unimportant**



The most frequently cited response (38%) was that mothers would rather prioritise their child’s academic education. Significant proportions of respondents also took issue with the nature of sports provision for children, with 33% saying there is too much emphasis on winning in children’s sports, and 29% saying there is a need for more and higher quality sports facilities. Despite Figure 24 revealing that mothers who are pro-sports and that work feel under pressure in terms of the time they have available to help their child participate in sports, only 8% of mothers who did not prioritise sports said that their child’s participation in sports would take up too much of their time. It is the case, however, that despite time constraints, the vast majority of mothers prioritise sports activities for their children.