

Information on the implementation of the agreed conclusions on ‘Women’s empowerment and the link to sustainable development’ Austrian answers

1. What measures have been taken to strengthen normative, legal and policy frameworks for the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?

Austria’s first [Voluntary National Review \(VNR\)](#) of the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was presented in July 2020 at the High-level Political Forum. The review explored three key issues in greater detail, one of which was “Women, youth, and ‘leaving no-one behind’”. Both progress as well as challenges regarding Goal 5, Gender Equality, were explored in the report and equality of women and men was emphasized as a prerequisite for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in a gender responsive manner is also **central to the work of the Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC)**. The following exemplifies the measures taken:

- Every project/programme that is supported by ADC must comply with mandatory minimum standards regarding gender including gender analysis, the use of sex-disaggregated data in reporting or gender-responsive targets.
- The Austrian Development Agency (ADA) has introduced a tool to assess potential gender-related risks that is applied to every project/programme considered for a certain amount of funding. In this process, specific recommendations are given concerning gender mainstreaming as well as targeted measures for gender equality within the project/programme activities. The partners are legally obliged to act on the recommendations and report on their activities and measures in this regard in their regular monitoring reports. The recommendations also relate to the EU GAP II and the SDGs.
- Since mid-2017, newly funded projects/programmes have been required to report on SDG indicators and are encouraged to include EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) II indicators as well.
- Furthermore, ADA evaluations include an assessment of the implementation of cross-cutting issues (gender, social aspects, and environment and climate change).

2. What actions and investments have been made for financing gender equality and the empowerment of women?

In 2020, for the first time in ten years, the annual budget of the division for Women and Equality was substantially increased from € 10.15 million to € 12.15 million. A major part serves to ensure a comprehensive counselling service, aiming at gender equality and the empowerment of women.

An essential measure to achieve equality between women and men is the provision of an Austria-wide (area coverage ratio of 88 %), anonymous/confidential and free counselling service for women and girls. About 100.000 women and girls in Austria annually turn to these low-threshold services. In 2019 this comprehensive advice and support was financially supported with more than € 5 million. As a result of the increase in the budget in 2020, all women’s counselling services received 12% more funding than in the previous year.

Also the **ADC** is strongly committed to raising the proportion of actions and investments towards projects focussing on gender equality and the empowerment of women. In 2019, 78.82% (= € 82.4 million) of the Austrian Development Agency's (ADA) supported projects were allocated a Gender Marker 1 or 2 – 30.4 % of which were allocated a Gender Marker 2. In accordance with the commitments of the Addis Ababa Action Plan, Austria has adopted the UN target of a minimum of 15% of all peace-building funding to have gender equality as a principal objective.

ADA has therefore significantly increased the number of projects focusing on gender equality and women's empowerment, illustrated by the following project examples (non-exhaustive list):

- **WEESC - Women's Economic Empowerment in the South Caucasus.** Contract Partner: UN WOMEN. Funding amount: €800,000; Project duration: 1.12.2018 – 31.7.2021.

The overarching goal/impact of the project is to ensure that women, particularly the poor and socially excluded, in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia are economically empowered and participate in relevant decision-making.

- **Expanding Choices: Gender Responsive Family Policies for the Private Sector in Western Balkans and Moldova.** Contract Partner: UNFPA. Funding amount: €1,500,000; Project duration: 1.12.2019 – 30.11.2022.

The overarching objective of this project is to expand choices for women so that they can fulfil their career, family and fertility aspirations. The specific outcomes are twofold: 1) Men, women and children benefit from gender-responsive family policies and initiatives that are offered by private sector companies and 2) Men, women and children benefit from national gender-responsive family policies that are promoted by governments.

- **Economic Empowerment for Women among Refugees and Host Community in West Nile.** Contract Partner: World Vision Austria. Funding amount: €249,700; Project duration: 1.1.2020 -31.12.2022.

The project's objective is the economic empowerment of the local population and refugees, especially women, in West Nile through financial inclusion. The project is intended to offer appropriate financial services for predominantly female refugees in the settlements as well as for the local population, while at the same time strengthening people's capacity to exploit their economic opportunities and use financial offers in a self-determined manner.

3. What steps have been taken to bolster women's leadership and women's full and equal participation in decision-making in all areas of sustainable development?

The following steps have been taken towards achieving Goal 5.5 of the SDGs: The Austrian federal government has committed itself to increasing the proportion of women delegated by the federal government on the supervisory boards of state-owned companies (50% federal participation and more). This should also send a signal to the other delegating bodies.

By the end of 2019, the federal government committed itself in a Council of Ministers resolution of 31 July 2019 to a 35% federal government quota for women. In a Council of Ministers resolution of 3 June 2020, the federal government committed itself to increasing the women's quota to 40%.

In 2019, the federal government's women quota was 43.3% on average (reporting period January to December 2019). However, in 12 of the 54 companies, the percentage of women was between 25% and 35%. In 7 companies, the percentage of women was below 25% in 2019.

Regarding women's leadership and women's full and equal participation in decision-making, the ADC is highly committed to implementing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda: In line with its National Action Plan on Implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325, Austria aims to strengthen the increased participation of women in all stages of peace processes and conflict prevention. Austria's focus in development cooperation lies on promoting local peace initiatives by women and women's organisations, and regional organisations as well as by effective policy making and legal response to gender-based violence before, during and after conflict (non exhaustive list:

- **Local communities build and sustain peace:** Strengthening women and youth participation in building sustainable peace in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kenya, Moldova, South Sudan, Uganda & Ukraine. Contract Partner: Global Network of Women Peacebuilders; Funding amount: € 1,000,073.25; Project duration: 01.10.2019-30.09.2022.

The project aims at improving the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, which recognizes women as agents of peace and calls for their meaningful participation at all levels of decision making on matters of peace and security and governance. It will generate commitments from national and local authorities in 8 countries as well as support from regional and global multilateral organizations.

- **IGAD Promoting Peace and Stability in the Horn of Africa Region (IPPSHAR)** – grants, technical assistance and project management. Contract Partner: EC Funds; Funding amount: € 18,476,000.00; Project duration: 24.03.2018-22.03.2022.

The overall objective of the Action is to contribute to achieving sustainable peace, security and stability for the attainment of economic integration and development of the IGAD region. The Action aims to support IGAD in the implementation of its Peace and Security Strategy 2016-2020. Besides the specific objectives, women's empowerment and UNSCR 1325 initiatives are also part of the actions.

- **POWER - Women's Empowerment Program in the Horn of Africa Region.** Contract partner: UN WOMEN; Funding amount: € 1,435,281.00; Project Duration: 1.12.2019-30.11.2021. POWER will contribute to the impact that every woman, every child, every adolescent girl, everywhere demands her rights to quality sexual, reproductive, maternal, new-born, child and adolescent health (SRMNCAH) services. This will be specifically applied to refugee camps and host communities in Ethiopia and Uganda.

4. What macroeconomic, labour and social policies have been put in place that promote full and productive employment and decent work for women, in response to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's employment and economic rights and independence?

5. What response and recovery measures to the COVID-19 pandemic have been taken to improve and expand social protection for women (e.g., healthcare coverage, unemployment benefits, paid sick leave, paid parental leave, maternity benefits, pensions, income support such as cash transfers)?

Questions 4-6: In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the following measures have been taken in Austria to support women and families:

- **Child-Bonus** of 360 EUR per *Child* (*Kinderzuschuss*);
- **Unemployed-Bonus** of 450 EUR for unemployed persons (*Arbeitslosen-Bonus*);
- **Reduction of income tax** (25 percent to 20 percent) (*Lohnsteuersenkung*);
- 30 Million Euros go to local authorities to provide **child care during holidays**;
- **Simplified filing for advance maintenance payments by the State**: In order to prevent financial bottlenecks (and to avoid possible dependencies arising from them), access to advance maintenance payments by the State for single parents has been simplified (acceleration of the procedure, no application for execution required);
- **„Special care time“** (*Sonderbetreuungszeit*): On March 16th, a new federal law came into force which allows employees to be granted a special care period of up to three weeks for children until the age of 14, who are subject to compulsory care. For the duration of the special care period, the employee retains his or her full entitlement to continued remuneration. The possibility to arrange special care time has been extended until the end of February 2021, irrespective of whether or not a person has already consumed a special care period in its first phase (up to and including July 24, 2020).
- **Financial support** is provided through a special fund dedicated to families (*Corona-Familienhärtefonds/ Familienhärteausgleich*): The hardship fund, which provides financial support for families with children, who - due to the current COVID19 crisis - are affected by income-reductions and/or have low incomes, giving rise to difficulties in coping with additional expenses due to the pandemic effects. Parts of these funds („Family hardship fund“) have been made available also to parents who receive social assistance/minimum income (including lone parents or single mothers). The corresponding guidelines, elaborated by the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection came into force on 26 June, 2020. According to these, benefits will be granted as a lump sum amount of 50 Euros per child and month for two months (this corresponds to a benefit of 100 euros per child) and will be paid out by the federal provinces.
- To avoid large numbers of layoffs in sectors particularly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic the existing model of **short-time work** (*Kurzarbeit*) was expanded extensively. Short-time work is going to be expanded until March 2021.
- No reductions in **childcare allowance** if it is not possible/reasonable to carry out the mother-child pass examinations at present; and
- **Covid19-Aid-Funds** have been implemented to cushion negative financial impacts (financial support for the federal states for additional care and nursing services; Corona relief fund and hardship fund: Financial support for companies)
- **Impact of the Corona crisis on women with disabilities**: The existing support instruments of the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection have been increased and expanded with a view to safeguarding existing jobs for women and men with disabilities. Measures in the context of wage promotions: 1.) Extension and increase of the job security grant, 2.) Increase in the fee subsidy 3.) Support for self-employed people with disabilities

6. What actions have been taken to expand the availability and affordability of care services to address the increase in unpaid care and domestic work as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., care subsidies, paid leave)?

Matters relating to the care of the elderly and care are exclusively the responsibility of the individual federal states in Austria. This means that the country-specific regulations in the area of care and support result in different operator structures in the countries, which include both public and private providers.

In the field of long-term care the Federal Government plays a major role in securing funding to support regional governments to cover expenditure for long-term services and facilities, alongside supporting the provision of benefits.

In order to cope with the COVID 19 crisis and to finance extraordinary burdens, a special grant of a total of EUR 100 Million was made available to the federal states by the federal government (care fund act). In an agreement between the federal government and the states, it was stipulated that the federal states would use the special grants in any case for the provision of replacement care facilities and clearing measures as well as the extension of telephone hotlines for caring relatives.

Regarding COVID19, the guidelines for 24-hour care were changed to support people in need of care: A subsidy of € 275 per month can be paid for only a self-employed care worker. From March 2020, people who have been cared for by an independent care worker for at least 14 days will receive a subsidy of € 550 for the duration of the pandemic. In all cases, the deployment times must reach the minimum extent specified in the house care law. All data subjects automatically receive this increased amount in full and no separate application is necessary.

The vast majority of care persons working in 24-hour care in Austria come from other EU member states. To guarantee the care for dependent persons, the 24-hour caregivers are granted a one-time special bonus (500 Euros) if the regular cycle is extended by another 4 weeks.

7. What action has been taken to increase resources and support for women's and civil society organizations as they cope with the COVID-19 pandemic?

To increase resources and support for women's and civil society organizations as they cope with the COVID-19 pandemic the following actions have been taken:

- **Increasing the funding of the Violence against Women Support Hotline and expanding the Helpchat:** Due to the Corona crisis, the subsidy of the online counselling service "Helpchat" was increased to extend its consulting hours. The help chat is now available daily from 15.00 - 22.00 hrs. Helpchat is a virtual advice centre for women and girls who are affected by violence in all its forms – psychological, physical, sexual – in their living environment. Currently it offers online consulting in German, English, Turkish, Russian, Romanian and Italian.
- **Increasing the funding of women's counseling centers by + 12%:** As stated in question 5 the Austrian women's counselling services (about 170) received 12% more funding than in the previous year. These services are run by non-governmental organisations and are available to all women and girls in Austria, close to their place of residence, as a

first point of contact. As a result of the Corona crisis, the counselling services shifted from personal individual advice to telephone and online advice. In some regions, women's advice centres have joined forces and set up advice hotlines. However, in special crises and when personal help is absolutely necessary, the possibility of personal counselling in the counselling centre has been still available, for example in cases of acute and current danger of family violence.

- **Information campaign** about the support facilities on several websites and flyers at grocery stores all over Austria
- **A call for funding for projects against violence and for the empowerment of women and girls throughout Austria** (the deadline for submission was 31.7.2020). A total of € 1.25 million will be made available for:
 - projects directly targeting those affected and vulnerable to gender-based violence and exploitation and their environment,
 - projects that contribute to prevention,
 - projects to improve basic knowledge and the data situation in the field of protection against violence and violence prevention.

Projects start on 1.10.2020 and end on 31.12.2021 at the latest.

8. What steps have been taken to improve gender-responsive data collection in the context of follow-up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and to track and monitor the gender-specific impacts and response measures to the COVID-19 pandemic?

In May 2020, Statistics Austria presented for the first time a national report with a detailed overview of the development of SDG indicators in Austria. For each Goal, a chapter regarding the progress shows the development of the indicators since 2010, including an assessment of the trend according to Eurostat's assessment mode. For Goal 5, Gender Equality, indicators regarding the Gender Pay Gap, domestic work, women in leadership positions, etc. are included.

The Austrian Development Agency (ADA) rigorously collects data from all funded projects/programmes based on the SDG and EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) II indicators. This data can be cross-analysed with response measures to the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, ADA has been supporting gender-responsive data collection through a long-term cooperation with the OECD DAC Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) in Uganda, Burkina Faso and the Southern Caucasus region, among others. The purpose of the projects is to establish a database and indicators on social norms and gender equality. The data is made available for and discussed with governmental stakeholders to support them in future policy making targeting gender equality and women's empowerment, and in contributing to SDG 5. The methodology draws on the successful country SIGI pilot in Uganda supported by the Austrian Development Cooperation and the OECD's expertise on gender statistics and capacity building.