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Austria: Persistent low fertility since the mid-1980s

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Abstract

This chapter offers an in-depth analysis of fertility in Austria, a country which has experienced a low and relatively stable fertility level and a gradual postponement of childbearing since the mid-1980s. We begin by summarising Austrian population trends in the post-World War II period and highlighting recent relatively high migration levels. We outline the long history of sub-replacement fertility and high childlessness in Austria and look in detail at recent parity-specific developments, trends in family size, delayed childbearing and persistent fertility differences by education level, country of origin and religious affiliation. The chapter then summarises main trends in family-related behaviour, including the changing patterns of leaving parental home, the rise in cohabitation, the decline in marriage and the rise of divorce and the diversity in non-marital childbearing, which has a long tradition in many parts of the country. We discuss the development of family policies in Austria and their relationship to fertility during the past decades. Social policies in Austria provide only a limited support for a reconciliation of childrearing and employment among mothers with children below the age of three. A combination of one of the highest family spending rates among the OECD countries and the low fertility rates indicate that structural constraints (such as the availability of childcare) constitute part of the explanation of low fertility.

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