

National report for Austria

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1 The Internet

1.1 Children's Internet access

According to European Statistics, 55% of the Austrian population use the Internet regularly and 40% of private households have domestic Internet subscriptions, which is not a very high figure compared to other European countries. 15.8% of Internet connections are broadband connections – that is more than in most Eastern and Southern European countries but less compared to Scandinavia or other countries like the Netherlands or the UK. Most measures in the Digital Opportunity Index show that Austria provides relatively good opportunities in the digital world, about average for Europe. Prices of broadband connections, however, are quite expensive compared to other countries.

Overall, the Internet is widely available in Austria (in libraries, Internet cafes, etc.). The speed of access is relatively good, even though the broadband penetration rate is not that high compared to the rates in Scandinavia, for instance.

Nearly all Austrian Internet providers offer security tools (filter software, etc.), are linked to the hotline 'Stop Line' and provide information and advice concerning the safe usage of the Internet.

1.2 Findings on children's access to the Internet and online technologies

In 2006, about 85% of children aged 11 to 18 years had access to the Internet and online technologies. 87% of those had access at home, 56% had the opportunity to use it in school, and 37% could use it via the access at a friend's home. 12% had access at work, approximately 10% in public buildings [134]. 46% of children aged 6 to 10 years had access to the Internet, the majority of them (85%) used it at home. Just 4% gained access via friends or at school.

No studies have directly dealt with inequalities in SES but there are statistics regarding all Austrian Internet users aged 14 years and older that show that households with high incomes are far more likely to have Internet access than households with low incomes. It can therefore be concluded that there are inequalities in access for children as well. In addition, the statistics show that far more students have access than apprentices or unemployed people [Jugendstudie 2006].

1.3 Findings on children's use of the Internet and online technologies

94% of 14 to 19 year olds use the Internet at least occasionally, for the younger users there are few current data: In 2006, more than 80% of 11 to 14 year olds used the Internet [134]. For children aged 8 to 10, there are only data from the years 2002 and 2003 and the evidence showed that a bare majority used the Internet at least sometimes [Rieder and Tatzl, 2003; Illich, 2003]

The 14 to 19 year olds are online more than two hours per week on average . The majority of 11 to 14 year old users are also online more than two hours a week, 15% of this group only an hour [134]. Almost 60% of users aged 8 to 10 say they are online just once a week, and just 20% state that they use the Internet daily or several times a week. In addition, the vast majority of this age group are online no longer than half an hour per session [Rieder and Tatzl, 2003; Illich, 2003].

Regarding Internet use, approximately 15% of 6 to 10 year old Internet users are online more than 2 hours per week, but 55% of 11 to 14 year olds and 73% of 14 to 18 year olds are [Jugendstudie 2006].

There are little differences concerning Internet access. In the age group of 6 to 10 years, 47% of boys and 43% of girls have access to the Internet; with the 11 to 18 year olds, there is hardly a difference [Jugendstudie 2006].

But there are differences in usage. 64% of 11 to 18 year old girls are online more than two hours a week, whereas 74% of boys are [134]. Among the 14 to 19 year olds, the gender gap is even clearer, where 54% of boys, but only 41% of girls use the Internet daily or several times a week [Nemetz, et al, 2003].

Evidence shows that safety and competence in dealing with the Internet primarily depends on the frequency of use (in the age group of 12 to 16 years). Boys seem to be a bit more skilled because of their more frequent use. In addition, boys describe themselves more often as competent and expert users than girls do [Team Online, 2001; Tatzl, 2003].

1.4 Internet and Media Content for Children

The Public Service Broadcaster (ORF) is a major provider of content for children. According to its self-image/conception, children and their needs should be integrated in nearly all the programmes of the ORF (orf.at). From October 19th to October 26th 2007, there was a week with the thematic priority 'children and media', and there were many programmes and other offerings for children (for instance, children's programmes in prime time, etc.).

It is also a major provider of such content online. For the broadcaster there is the advantage that all online content can be advertised for in the children's programmes on TV. So the degree of familiarity with this online content among children is quite high.

The online content seems to be rich and broad. There are several sections for all children's programmes with different thematic priorities and a many offerings (news, action, stars, technology and science, animals and nature, quizzes, shows and television, etc.). Children are not targeted by commercial media content.

1.5 Opportunities experienced by children online

There are no available data concerning perceived opportunities by parents or adults.

For 8 to 10 year olds, the primary online opportunities are:

- Educational resources
- Entertainment, games and fun
- "Preparation for life as an adult" [Illich, 2003]

For 12 to 16 year olds, the main opportunities are concerning:

- Entertainment
- Technological expertise and literacy (dealing with technological aspects and media, being able to programme, downloading, etc.)
- Social networking for old/new friends (the Internet as tool for more communication, to expand social contacts, the possibility to prepare for relationships, etc.) [Tatzl, 2003; Team Online, 2001]

For 14 to 19 year olds, the primary opportunity is considered to be:

- Social networking for old/new friends (the Internet offers endless opportunities for communication) [Nemetz, et al, 2003]

There is no evidence for the hypothesis that the older children get, the more their usage of the Internet (in terms of time, frequency) increases. The most frequently used services, contents and activities are searching for information, communication and entertainment (games, etc.), with different priorities among the various age groups. The older children get, the more important communication becomes and the extent of use for this purpose increases. Other uses and activities (such as online games) fade into the background.

12 to 16 year old boys often see the Internet as a space in which they can deal with media or technological aspects (downloading, programming, etc.) while girls of that age rather appreciate it as a tool for communication, for expansion of social contacts or as a possibility to prepare for future relationships [Tatzl, 2003].

With younger children (8 to 10 years) there are primarily differences concerning the search for information: 62% of girls use the Internet to search for information, but just 38% of boys use it for that purpose. By contrast 57% of boys surf the Internet 'aimless' and just for fun, while just 43% of girls do so [Illich, 2003].

1.6 Risks experienced by children online

a) Among the perceived online risks, notable ones include children sitting too long in front of the screen, illegal or harmful/offensive content (children may come across content that could be inappropriate for them), neglect of social contacts and "real-life"-friends, and contact with strangers [Geretschlaeger, 2001].

b) Risks experienced by 11 to 18 year olds include offensive content (pornographic web sites, violence), gambling, self harm (suicide forums, pages, where drugs are offered), racist material, extreme violence, contact with strangers [Großegger, 2005].

Data from the year 2001 show that about 50% of 10 to 15 year olds have already come across porn sites, about 10% have been confronted with right-wing content and 15% have already surfed on websites with violent content. A significant percentage (more than 40%) are often or at least occasionally on gambling sites. 30% have already been invited to meetings by online acquaintances. 60% of 11 to 18 year olds have already had contact with pornographic content, 50% were on gambling sites, 20% have used pages on which drugs were offered and 11% have been in suicide forums [Geretschlaeger, 2001; Großegger, 2005].

Quite interesting in this context are the views of 14 to 19 year olds on the subject of pornography. In a study that was conducted in 2003, 42% of girls and 57% of boys in this age group declared that they were against a ban of online pornography and that everyone should decide for him- or herself whether he or she wants to access pornographic content or not [Nemetz, et al, 2003]. All in all it can also be noted that there are hardly any data concerning young children (up to age 10) and contact with problematic offerings and content. But the available evidence shows that there are relatively few fears in this age group; mostly viruses or technical problems are experienced as risks [Geretschlaeger, 2001].

The EB 2007 qualitative research showed that children 9 to 14 years are concerned about the risk of viruses on the Internet. The attendance of chat rooms and the up- and downloading of files are rated as very risky. Internet telephony is the only activity that is not considered risky by any child.

According to the Eurobarometer survey of 2005/6, 15% of parents or guardians think that their child has ever encountered harmful or illegal content on the Internet.

1.7 Internet regulation and promotion

The ISPA (Association of Internet providers in Austria):

1. Ensures a voluntary, effective self-control;
2. Operates an independent provider hotline ('Stop Line') for reporting illegal content online, and works together with the intelligence unit of the Interior Ministry and the legal authorities;
3. Has decided on a code of conduct for its members (as one of the first European federations of Internet service providers).

Nearly all Austrian Internet providers offer security tools (filter software, etc.), are linked to the hotline 'Stop Line' and provide information and advice concerning the safe usage of the Internet. Many providers cooperate with SaferInternet.at, the Austrian information and coordination centre in the Safer Internet network of the European Union.

There is a distinction *between 'illegal' and 'harmful' content*. Illegal content will be prosecuted; harmful content is opposed by other measures (such as information and awareness-raising campaigns, family filters, etc.). Everything that is illegal in the 'real world' is also illegal on the Internet (such as child pornography, Nazi content, fraud, etc.) and will therefore be prosecuted.

Generally it can be said that there are not many relevant laws and requirements.

As regards the role of the Government and regulator:

- a) Several programmes have been implemented to promote the use of the Internet. Currently the ICT-Task Force (consisting of the Federal Ministry of transport, innovation and technology, the Federal Chancellery, representatives of the private sector enterprise, of chambers of commerce, of ISPA – Internet Service Providers Austria and representatives of science) are working on a new programme.
- b) Multiple programmes have been started to raise awareness of potential social impacts and risks related to the Internet. The last programme was launched in September 2007: the initiative of the federal government 'safe Internet use'.
- c) Several programmes were implemented to promote media literacy.

Under the direction of the Federal Chancellery and the Ministry of Social Affairs several ministries together with *SaferInternet.at* created an information platform and activities on the following topics:

- Shopping on the Internet
- Illegal content online
- Personal data protection
- Copyright on the Internet
- Phishing
- Computer and online games
- Harassment on the Internet ("cyber-stalking")
- Protection of children against inappropriate content
- Advice for parents
- Media education for teachers
- Spam
- Protection of computer

Austria has a distinctive institutionalised system of self-and co-regulation. Aspects of information society rely very much on this system. The Advisory Board for information society (BIG) that was implemented in 1998 is a panel for cooperation and exchange concerning information on legal issues of the Internet and the new information and communication technologies. The members of the board are the federal ministries, representatives of the industry, users, providers and NGOs.

NGOs have been influential in shaping legislation/regulation since they are members of the already mentioned Advisory Board for the information society, a panel for cooperation and

exchange concerning information on legal issues of the Internet and the new information and communication technologies.

1.8 Parental mediation

The majority of parents set time limits, but mostly they are less strict concerning visits to specific websites [Geretschlaeger, 2001]. By contrast some parents use filter software or even monitor the visited web pages but that happens only in the minority of cases. Others want to have special web portals for children with a child safety lock offered by Internet providers which would obviate (too) complicated filter software [Rieder and Tatzl, 2003; Illich, 2003].

Among older children and adolescents the level of parental regulation decreases constantly; parents become less strict, especially concerning the monitoring of visited websites when their children get older. The only things that are strictly forbidden are visiting porn sites and online-shopping [Geretschlaeger, 2001].

1.9 Media literacy

It can be noted that younger children (under 10 years old) often have few skills in dealing with the Internet and consequently they estimate their skills as limited [Tatzl, 2003]. Older children and adolescents are more experienced and therefore their use is far more skilled and safe. For the age group of 12 to 16 years it seems that safety and competence in dealing with the Internet primarily depends on the frequency of use; boys are a bit more competent according to the evidence. In addition to that boys of this age group more often declare themselves to be expert users than girls do [Team Online, 2001].

As mentioned earlier, it is interesting in this context that 14 to 19 year old users seem to be quite liberal concerning online pornography. The majority of this age group declared that they were against a ban of online pornography and that everyone should decide for him- or herself whether he or she wants to access pornographic content or not [Nemetz, et al, 2003].

The EB 2007 qualitative research showed that all kids aged 9 to 14 are aware of the risks related to the Internet and mobile phones. The younger kids usually turn to their parents or elder siblings when they have problems. Older children often try to solve a problem themselves and only ask for advice if they are not able to manage themselves.

According to the Eurobarometer 2005/06 survey, 67% parents/guardians think their child knows what to do if uncomfortable online, 10% think they do not.

The evidence shows that safety and competence in dealing with the Internet among 12 to 16 year old users primarily depends on the frequency of use [Team Online, 2001; Tatzl, 2003].

1.10 Factors shaping public discourses about the Internet

Some NGOs are very professional in raising awareness. They work on special issues and inform the public. SaferInternet.at, the Austrian information and coordination centre in the Safer Internet network of the European Union, for example, specialises in many target groups. Other NGOs only specialise in one target group (for example, children, parents, etc.). There are also NGOs that present the Internet as dangerous and demand certain bans that are mostly not elaborate. Most of them have been active in raising awareness campaigns approximately since 1998, and:

- a) They are often coordinated
- b) They are EC and national initiatives.
- c) Some of the NGOs provide advice and helplines.

- d) Mostly the awareness campaigns are targeted at various groups (children directly, parents, teachers, etc.)
- e) Some risks are emphasised more:
 - Shopping on the Internet
 - Personal data protection
 - Copyright on the Internet
 - Phishing
 - Harassment on the Internet ("cyber-stalking")
 - Legal protection for young children and the youth
 - Spam
 - Protection of computer
 - Illegal content online
- f) Some campaigns are quite successful while others fail. It often depends on the kind of coordination. Campaigns that are coordinated by more NGOs have better chances to be a success.

There are no "major" key events that influenced public discourses in this field, unlike some other countries. Despite the fact that there were spectacular instances that could be assigned to paedophile cases (for instance, in the case of Natascha Kampusch, a girl who turned up again eight years after she had been kidnapped), there was no connection drawn to the role of the Internet. In the case of Natasha Kampusch, there were no online videos of abuse or evidence that the crime could have been committed with help of the Internet. But there are some ongoing media reports about paedophile cases and online child pornography. Nearly every year there are such reports about international police investigations and that some Austrians are suspects in paedophile cases. Sometimes there are also single perpetrators in the headlines, for example, one about 70 year old pensioner who downloaded child pornography online. In 2002, the largest ever police investigation concerning online child pornography in Austria took place with 300 house searches and 275 suspects. This incident had some effect. There was a good deal of media coverage and the media as well as politicians demanded stricter laws to make prosecution of online child pornography easier.

2 The Educational system

2.1 General education

According to UNESCO's Human Development Report 2004, the adult literacy rate in Austria adds up to 99% (persons aged 15 years and older).

The educational level of the parent's generation is relatively high: nearly 80% have upper secondary education. The disadvantage of not having upper secondary education is substantial in terms of employment prospects in Austria. Just 18% of the parent's generation are qualified to the tertiary level. So it can be said that to a certain degree higher education on university level is more 'elitist' than 'mass'. Nevertheless there has been growth in tertiary education over the last decade even though the increase rates are not very high compared to other OECD countries. Things are changing here but not very fast.

One change for today's children apart from the different content of teaching and other aspects can be seen in the greater choice of which school to attend in upper secondary education since there are more types of these schools. Another change is the inclusion of media in class teaching. Handling computers or dealing with the Internet has become daily routine for pupils; there is media and ICT education as well.

2.2 Education and the Internet

The technical infrastructure to support Internet access is good. In 2000, almost two-thirds of Austrian schools had Internet access; as of 2004 nearly 100% provide access. In 2006, nearly 70% of schools used the Internet via broadband connection. There is a large variation between school types: while only 59% of primary schools have a broadband Internet connection, the penetration is highest among upper secondary schools, with 83% and vocational schools reaching 86%. There is hardly any variation with regard to broadband access between urban and rural areas. It is 'easy' for children to access the Internet at school: 65% of schools use computers in classrooms, 50% in computer labs, 17% in libraries and 25% have other locations accessible for pupils. On average there are 6 pupils per computer in schools.

Media education in Austria is taught as a principle of education in all subjects. It is explicitly defined and divided into four aspects (media use, media related communications, the media as an economic force or the mass media as an institution and one's own media creation). The principle/axiom that forms the basis of media education in Austria is that school needs to contribute to the development of communication and making young people responsible in times when there major challenges are evoked by the media. So media education is an important part of education according to the curriculum but it is not a separate subject. In contrast, IT education is a separate subject on the curriculum, but in many schools there are only two lessons per week.

3 Wider society

3.1 Social change

In the last few years it became clear that there has been social change concerning demographic characteristics, specifically related to the ageing of Austrian society. This ageing manifests itself in three dimensions: the rise of average life expectancy (currently at 77 years for male newborns, and nearly 83 years for women), the increase in the proportion of elderly people (over 65 years) in the total population and the increase in the number of very old people (85 years and older). This 'ageing' of society is primarily the consequence of the decline in the fertility rate. In 2030, 14% of the population will be under 15 years old, 55% will be 15 to 59 and 30% will be 60 or older. As the number and proportion of people above retirement age rise, the proportion of children and adolescents will decrease strongly. This social change was often discussed in the public in recent weeks because pensions were raised by the Government.

There has been enthusiasm about changes associated with the Information Society. The Government was especially proud when it was announced that almost 100% of Austrian school had access to the Internet. This happened in 2004. At that point only 30% of all schools had access via broadband; driven by this enthusiasm all schools were promised that they would get broadband access by the end of 2007. At the moment 70% have broadband connections, so the promise is not entirely fulfilled.

Now there is also much interest in the results of the current project 'Web 2.0 Klasse', a cooperation between the major provider for telecommunications and the Federal Ministry for Education concerning the use of Web 2.0 in school classes. The study was conducted by the University of Salzburg (Ingrid Paus-Hasebrink). An important result is that the use of weblogs (blogs) or wikis increases learning motivation and media literacy among pupils.

As regards Internet access in schools and using the opportunities of web-based learning, for instance, there is a sense of the country being at the leading edge. But there are also negative aspects associated with the Information Society and especially with the Internet. Although a good deal of money was invested in a good Internet infrastructure, there is

stagnation in the growth of broadband connections in private households (only 46% have access via broadband). These figures are far below the European average. In this discourse, the country is seen as being left behind.

As regards social inequalities, key divides are:

- Men have a much higher income than women (even when they work in the same job);
- More than 1 million people have to live off an income that lies below the official poverty line (13% of the population);
- More than 13% of children up to age 17 live in households with incomes less than 50% of the median;
- Access to higher education very much depends on the level of household income and less education means higher risk of poverty. The chances of children from low-income families leaving school after lower secondary school are relatively higher even if their ability to learn is rated as positive by primary school teachers. Only a small proportion of children who have parents with a low income, no higher education and who live in rural areas gain an academic degree. By contrast, 60% of children whose parents are academics gain an academic degree.
- Especially in rural areas, there is a significant lack of institutional childcare facilities as well as after-school care facilities, which is estimated to have a negative impact in terms of social mobility;
- Immigrants, especially those who are not able to speak German properly, to some extent have problems living in Austria. A high percentage of families of foreign workers live in small sub-standard flats, often have poorly paid jobs and are sometimes discriminated against. . Certain politicians, especially, tend to exploit immigrants in times of election campaigns when they poke fears of threatened jobs or increasing crimes committed by 'foreigners'.

It seems that being female, being a member of a working-class family and living in a rural area is enough to minimise chances for higher education or equality. The situation is often worse if the child was a member of a family of a foreign worker.

Turning to questions of urban-rural divides, it is first worth pointing out that the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Austria is relatively high above the European average. The agricultural sector accounts for just 1.7% of the GDP, industrial sector accounts for about 30% and approximately 68% comes from the services sector.

There is still a rural population in Austria. 5% of the working population are working in agriculture. Over the last decades there has been a continuous decrease in the number of these people. In 1960, a third of the workforce accounted for the agricultural sector.

There is no evidence that there is more Internet adoption in urban centres than in rural areas. The figures for Internet access and usage are more or less the same, whether or not it concerns small villages with a population of 2.000 or large urban centres with a population of one million.

The unemployment rate in Austria is around 5% in 2007 while the female employment rate amounts to 64% in 2006 (OECD, EUROSTAT).

There are no precise statistics as regards what percentage of the population is involved in manual versus non-manual work. 5% of the labour force is employed in the agricultural sector, 27.5% in the industrial sector and 67.5% in the services sector. It can be estimated that the majority of those employed in the agricultural and industrial sector work manually, even though there is, of course, also non-manual work to do there. In the services sector most of the employees may be involved in non-manual work. Therefore it could be concluded that the majority of the Austrian population is involved in non-manual work, estimated 60 to 65%.

In 2005 there was an inflow of 56.000 foreign Nationals in Austria. Overall there were more than 800.000 foreign citizens living in Austria, which make up for about 10% of the total population. Most immigrants come from former Yugoslavia, Germany and Turkey.

3.2 Role of the state

The level of free speech allowed in Austria is high. The law provides for freedom of speech and of the press, and generally these rights are respected in practice. Independent media are active and provide a wide variety of views without restriction. There are no government restrictions on the Internet or on academic freedom. Nevertheless there are a few problems concerning free speech. For instance, there is a strict application of slander laws that tends to discourage reports of police abuse. There is sometimes criticism that the use of these slander laws is abused to protect politicians, an aspect that affects freedom of speech and of the press in a negative way because it is getting more difficult for media and journalists to criticise persons of public interest. Unfortunately it seems that this tendency has increased over the past few years.

4 Other factors affecting children's online experiences

According to statistics, about 50% of Austrians are able to talk English passably. Adolescents have better English skills, especially those with Matura (Austrian equivalent of A-level exam). When conducting a qualitative evaluation of the knowledge and use of English among children and young people, it seems that their English skills are good. Children start to have English lessons in primary school at the age of 8 or 9, and the lessons continue until the age of 18 or 19 depending on which school the children and young people attend.

The rise of the Internet also has an influence on the English skills. Since most of the offerings on the Web are in English, young people need to get used to the language in order to make reasonable use of the Internet. The German language makes up for a relatively large part on the Internet because websites of Germany, Austria and partially Switzerland are in the same language.

Unfortunately no current data concerning media equipment in children's rooms are available. But there are data from the year 2003 and they show that children's rooms have already been quite media rich at that time: 37% of children aged 6 to 10 and 53% of young people aged 11 to 14 had their own private television in Austria. 30% of children had their own personal computer in the children's room. The top figures were reached in Vienna and Lower Austria: 60% of Viennese children and 65% of children in Lower Austria had a TV in their room. It can be assumed that these rates have at least not decreased over the years. This leads to the conclusion that the emergence of a 'bedroom culture' can be taken into consideration but there is not enough evidence to prove these tendencies. More research in this field is needed.

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