**Austrian Reply to Questionnaire in relation to Human Rights Council resolution 47/24 on human rights and climate change**

**Input by Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology; Federal Ministry for Finance; Federal Ministry Agriculture, Regions and Tourism; City of Vienna**

**1.** Please describe the **impacts** of the adverse effects of climate change on the full and effective enjoyment of the human rights of people in vulnerable situations. Where possible, please share specific examples and stories.

How people deal with the environment and the associated perception of risk is influenced by both individual factors and the social environment. How people confront climate change and whether and in what way they are able to implement appropriate strategies or use existing resources for adaptation depends to a large extent on the specific social conditions of those affected, on individual preconditions and on the sociocultural environment.

On a global level, but also within Austrian society, there are inequalities in terms of lifestyle, income level and resource consumption. There are those who consume more resources but are less affected by negative environmental impacts (e.g. the negative consequences of climate change), and there are others, mostly socially disadvantaged, who suffer both socially and through increased environmental burdens.

**2.** Please describe any specific **policy, legislation, practice or strategy** that your Government has undertaken, in compliance with applicable international human rights law, to promote an approach to climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as loss and damage that ensures the full and effective enjoyment of the human rights of people in vulnerable situations. Please also note and identify any relevant mechanisms for ensuring **accountability** for these commitments including their means of implementation.

The Austrian government is committed to reaching climate neutrality by 2040. In addition, it is equally necessary that we adapt and build resilience to current and future changes to our planets climate.

The Austrian Strategy for Adaptation to Climate Change[[1]](#footnote-1) was adopted at the Federal level by the Council of Ministers in October 2012 and was endorsed by the State Governors’ Conference in May 2013. The strategy consists of two parts. Part 1 – “Context” is the core of our strategy; and Part 2 – “Action“ contains an action plan. Through this strategy, Austria was one of the first EU Member States to link a strategic framework (NAS) with a comprehensive national action plan (NAP) for implementing concrete recommendations for action. A revised NAS and NAP were adopted in 2017.[[2]](#footnote-2)

In pursuing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, UN 2015) adopted by the United Nations in September 2015, sustainable economic, social and environmental development is to be achieved by 2030 worldwide. Of the 17 key goals, Sustainability Goal 13 specifically refers to climate change and its consequences. In addition to increasing resilience to climate risks, concrete measures should also be integrated into planning and policy processes. The SDGs have an overarching and interconnected character. This includes the Paris Agreement (UNFCCC 2015) and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 (UNISDR 2015).

In Austria, the implementation of the SDGs in the specific ministries will be carried out through integration into sector-specific strategies and programs. An inter-ministry working group was set up under the leadership of the Austrian Federal Chancellery and the Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs to prepare regular progress reports.

In the context of promoting climate change mitigation and adaptation and ensuring the full and effective enjoyment of the human rights of people in vulnerable situations, Austria counts on international financial institutions (IFIs) as one of its key partners. The main framework for cooperation with these institutions is provided by the Strategic Guidelines for International Financial Institutions (IFI Strategy) of the Federal Ministry of Finance (BMF). At the national level, these guidelines comply with the Austrian Development Cooperation Act and are aligned with the three-year program of Austrian development policy.

Although their structure and approach may vary, all IFIs have relevant mechanisms and tools to ensure accountability and a responsible development approach (i.e., avoiding negative social and environmental impacts and being accountable for harm caused to communities by their development projects). In most cases, accountability mechanisms are formal grievance mechanisms within an IFI. Because large-scale IFI projects can also pose significant risks and changes to communities, accountability mechanisms serve as a neutral forum through which communities can voice their concerns. On the one hand, these grievance mechanisms can promote dialogue and reduce power imbalances between parties, and on the other hand, IFIs can build trust with their members through them.

Within the framework of the Austrian strategy on international climate finance for the period 2013-2020 as well as the revision of the Austrian strategy on international climate finance, which has been undertaken in 2017, human rights are explicitly referred to.According to paragraph 52i of the revised strategy, "other positive effects triggered by the use of climate finance, such as positive environmental and biodiversity effects not directly relevant to climate change, positive socio-economic effects (such as local value creation, health care, income generation), improvement of working conditions and worker protection, as well as gender equality and safeguarding the interests of indigenous peoples" should be explicitly taken into account when approving concept notes and selecting bilateral and multilateral projects.

According to the **Vienna Smart City Strategy**, CO2 emissions per capita should be reduced by 80 percent (compared to 1990) by 2050. Furthermore, the Smart City Strategy aims to reduce per capita energy consumption by 40 percent (compared to 2005) by 2050. Vienna fulfils the most crucial requirements to be defined as a smart city, as it drives innovation, has an excellent environmentally friendly public transport system, a new car-sharing program, renowned universities and other science and research institutions, forward-looking companies and start-ups, a committed political leadership and interested residents.

**3.** Please share a summary of any **relevant data** that captures how the adverse effects of climate change have affected people in vulnerable situations, taking into account multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination (i.e. discrimination based on a combination of multiple grounds, including disability, gender, race, colour, sex, language, religion, nationality and migration status).

The Austrian Adaptation Strategy aims at avoiding adverse effects of climate change on the environment, society and economy, and taking advantage of opportunities, which arise. Adaptation measures should thus involve no social downsides; rather, they should minimize risks to democracy, health, security, and social justice.

In most cases, there are several factors (low income, low education, low social capital, precarious work and housing conditions, unemployment, limited agency) that make underprivileged groups more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Different social groups have different levels of ability to adapt and are more affected by climate policy measures, such as taxes and charges on energy (APCC 2014). People with disabilities are also faced with new challenges, which require appropriate provision, in civil catastrophes for example.

In addition, comprehensive demographic changes are expected. Changes in population size, age distribution, number of single-person households, or other demographic characteristics have implications for handling the environment, but also for specific needs (e.g., increase in heat sensitivity with increasing age). Demographic changes thus also have consequences for the planning and implementation of climate change adaptation measures.

It can be assumed that the following Austrian population groups will be particularly affected by climate change and by potential adaptation measures due to their location and/or socio-economic situation: people at risk of poverty or marginalization; chronically ill people, people with poor health (among other things during hot spells or vector-transmitted sicknesses); children; elderly people; people living in areas threatened by natural hazards; people living in areas increasingly subject to heat waves; people who are occupationally exposed to extreme weather conditions; people whose income may be at least temporarily threatened by the effects of climate change.

The potential of a community and the population living there to respond to climate-induced changes is determined not only by available technologies and resources, but to a high degree by existing human and social capital as well.

People and their cohesion are the most important asset of every community. How to use and strengthen this in order to be forward-looking in terms of climate change and to approach the future with more confidence as a community was the focus of the Capital-Adapt project funded by the Climate and Energy Fund (KlimaNetz, The Role of Human Rights) and Social Capital in Dealing with and Adapting to Climate Change). How the process itself – from problem finding to the formulation of solutions – can be progressively implemented in a community has been published in a compact handbook (Feiner et al., 2012). It describes in six steps the process through which a community can raise existing social and human capital, identify the areas affected by climate change, and then develop measures to tackle the challenges. In addition, there is information on indicators for human and social capital related to the impacts of climate change.

In densely populated residential areas, increased heat during summer will lead to more unfavourable space and living environments and thus to negative consequences for health. This problem is compounded by the lack of nocturnal cooling. Climate change strategy -Talk developed brochures on how to deal with heat for carers and relatives of elderly or dependent persons, and for kindergarten teachers and parents of small children (Grothmann et al., 2014a, b).

STOPHOT aimed at developing measures to improve living conditions for older persons (> 65 years) during hot periods in Vienna. The results of the project i.a. other things that the heat stress and the risk for elderly people in urban areas are spatially and socially unevenly distributed. As part of the project, measures were developed that address older people directly, serve to inform and raise awareness, and that can be used in urban and open space planning (Arnberger 2014).

**4.** Please describe any **mechanisms and tools** that are in place to measure and monitor the impacts of climate change on the full and effective enjoyment of the human rights of people in vulnerable situations.

The first progress report on the implementation of measures defined in the NAS/NAP was published by the Environment Ministry and taken note of by the Council of Ministers in 2015. The methodological concept for monitoring and evaluation is pragmatic and comprises two work streams: 1) a self-assessment approach using a stakeholder survey based on the NAP and sent to the key actors mentioned therein; 2) an indicator-based approach with qualitative and quantitative data collections. The results give a broad picture of the state of implementation and of key adaptation trends in Austria. The progress report shows that implementation and mainstreaming of adaptation is increasing in Austria with a different level of progress in the various areas of action. Based on these results, sectoral goals have been introduced in the revised NAS and NAP. The results have been of high relevance for the first update of the Austrian Adaptation Strategy and its Action Plan as of 2017.

A second progress report was published by the BMK and taken note of by the Council of Ministers in September 2021.[[3]](#footnote-3) For this progress report, the written stakeholder survey was replaced with a series of stakeholder workshops per sectoral area of action in the NAP, which provided rich in-depth insights and delivered group-based expert judgments on the implementation progress. The complementary indicator-based assessment approach was maintained. Based on the results, work on the second revision of the NAS and NAP is scheduled to start already in 2021.

The main results from the second progress report can be summarised as follows:

* In agriculture, awareness of soil protection is continuously increasing. Many measures in the Agri-environmental Programme (“ÖPUL”) contribute to adaptation; an even stronger reception of ÖPUL would be desirable. Organic farming is guided by objectives that are also in line with, and contribute to, adaptation to climate change. In this context, it is very positive that the share of organically farmed land in Austria continues to rise and has increased to 26.1% of the agriculturally used area.
* In forestry, the decline in the proportion of spruce and the trend towards mixed stands with a higher proportion of hardwoods is continuing, although at a somewhat slower pace.
* In water management, progress has been made in adaptive flood risk management. Additionally, newly created retention areas contribute significantly to protection against floods and natural hazards in general. In the area of water ecology, further measures were implemented to improve river continuity and morphology.
* Forecasting and early warning systems play an important role in the protection against natural hazards, but also in the activity area of transport infrastructure. Warning systems have been established for a large number of parameters (heat, heavy rain, floods, forest fires, hail, storm, snow, black ice, avalanches) and have been further developed in some cases.
* Early warning and monitoring systems are also of enormous importance for health. Since 2017, a national heat protection plan has been in place, which primarily aims to inform the population. The majority of the Provinces has developed heat protection plans and heat warning services.

The Austrian Adaptation Strategy explicitly refers to the increasing importance of adaptation to climate change at the regional and local level, with the aim of offering more local support. With the Climate Change Adaptation Model Regions Programme4 (KLAR!), a Europe-wide flagship initiative was created in 2016, in which currently 74 Austrian districts (as of July 2021) are implementing adaptation measures or developing adaptation concepts.

Prevention and disaster risk reduction actions regarding natural hazards like storms, avalanches, rockfall, or landslides is handled and managed by the Austrian Forest Technical Service for Torrent and Avlanche Control and by the department of Protective Forest Policy. Climate change and its impacts are always taken into consideration for planning or implementation of measures for the prevention of environmental degradation or risks. Additionally, Austria is required to undertake further positive measures to inform and protect its people, e.g. by informing about the possibility of the occurrence of natural hazards, their implications (like hazard and risk maps, available online), by disaster management, by alerting and by prevention actions. The Austrian federal state is responsible for preventative action, whereas federal provinces and municipalities are responsible for disaster management.

**5.** Please identify and share examples of **good practices and challenges** in the promotion, protection, and fulfilment of the human rights of people in vulnerable situations in the context of the adverse effects of climate change.

GIAKlim Project

The GIAKlim project (Gender Impact Assessment in the Context of Climate Change Adaptation and Natural Hazards) showed that gender and group-specific aspects of dealing with natural hazards have to date tended to receive little attention from emergency services and from the population at large. However, fostering awareness of the different needs and requirements makes sense and can contribute to improvement of disaster relief and promotion of self-dependence. The integration of gender-specific aspects can contribute towards a more comprehensive and efficient disaster management. However, this requires a differentiated approach that takes account of different needs and allows equal involvement in decision-making processes. In addition, proposals for gender-sensitive methods of analysis of natural disasters in Austria were developed at different levels. For the local and small regional levels, a new form of gender-sensitive analysis, the Gender Analysis of Natural Disasters, has been developed.

BALANCE project

The project BALANCE designs low-emissions policy mixes that reconcile the climate and social policy arenas in the domain of housing. Housing contributes significantly to Austria’s greenhouse gas emissions and is a pivotal factor for reducing social inequality. This example showcases typical dynamics where climate and social policy intersect: Energy poverty, for instance, arises at the nexus of low income, poor housing quality and high energy costs, leading to higher rebound effects among the less affluent. Introducing strict standards for energy efficient buildings may jeopardise the provision of affordable and socially inclusive housing, as standards may lead to additional segmentation of the housing market or social segregation between residential areas. BALANCE aims to design low-emissions policies for the housing domain that reach climate targets without cutting back on the social agenda.

JUSTFair

Natural hazard events cause huge economic damage and social disruption in our society. Impacts not only result from the frequency and magnitude of natural hazard events and an increasing exposure of buildings or infrastructure, but also from the vulnerability and resilience of residents and businesses. However, current natural hazard management practice commonly overlooks who actually lives and conducts commerce in the areas at risk. The prevalent spatial-economic, technocratic approach builds protection based on the number of buildings and infrastructure exposed to natural hazards. The debate on social justice in relation to adaptation to climate change mainly focuses on generalized groups, such as migrants, the less affluent or the elderly. However, assessing the vulnerability of residents does not just boil down to simple socio-demographic numbers. Whether a household is vulnerable not only depends on its economic affluence, but also on the physical characteristics of the residence, on the social capital this household commands as well as on the question of how well it is heard in the political process. The project JustFair expands the current narrow perspective on vulnerability by analysing this very interplay between various resources and develops governance guidance on how to make the diversity of citizens and businesses accessible for equitable, socially just climate adaptation policy.

Children and youth strategy City of Vienna

To advance children and youth participation, Vienna has presented its first children and youth strategy on May 28th 2020. It´s goal is to give Vienna the opportunity to become the **most child and youth friendly city**. It includes a budget of 1 million Euros (starting from 2021 and repeatedly for every year until 2025) as well as a children and youth parliament. The Goal of the strategy is to implement the first projects as early as of 2021.

As a result of some workshops, over 22 500 children and adolescents had very precise ideas: more trees, less plastic, fewer planes, a day without cars, less stress and a peaceful coexistence. The most important topics were nature and its preservation, a child-friendly public transport and everything concerning school and education. Vienna´s children and youth strategy is not legally binding for Vienna´s citizens. The strategies progress will be measured by a periodic monitoring including both the children´s and youth advocacy (Kinder- und Jugendanwaltschaft Wien) and children and youth in the youth parliament. One item that will help to improve the climate will be that every child and teenager will have the opportunity to plant a tree once a year.

**6.** Please include examples and good practices that highlight **international and multilateral cooperation and approaches** that are implemented through close consultation with and active involvement of people in vulnerable situations.

With the help of the Austrian Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction the following tasks can be supported: Exchange of experiences and concepts, coordination of the strategies, creation of synergies, and joint developments in the context of crisis intervention and prevention. Actors in the area of adaptation to climate change are actively involved in this national joint effort.

Austria is a contracting Party to the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), which adopted a Climate Adaptation Strategy in 2012. The Strategy provides a strategic framework for integrating cli-mate adaptation of the water sector into the implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive and the EU Floods Directive.

Austria is an explicit supporter of the promotion of human rights in the context of its role in the Board of the Green Climate Fund (GCF, www.gcfund.org). This implies the attempt to mainstream the explicit consideration of human rights in the Fund’s operations, particularly in the implementation of the GCF’s Updated Strategic Plan for the period 2020-2023. In this context, Austria promotes the protection of minorities and vulnerable groups as a condition sine qua non of an effective implementation of the long term goals set by Art. 2.1 Paris Agreement.

**7.** Please provide **any additional information** you believe would be useful to support climate action that promotes the full and effective enjoyment of the human rights of people in vulnerable situations.

The research project ClimAccount Human Rights Accountability of the EU and Austria for Climate Policies in Third Countries and their possible Effects on Migration focused on the accountability of the EU and its Member States with regard to negative impacts of climate change measures they are involved in on human rights in third countries – especially those associated with ‘migration effects’. Based on three case studies – projects registered under the Kyoto Protocol’s Clean Development Mechanism – the human rights dimension of climate change action was discussed, areas of human rights concerns that were discernible in all three case study projects were identified, the issue of extraterritorial human rights obligations was analysed and the subject of access to justice was scrutinized. The following key insights can be summarized:

Human rights are inadequately incorporated into the global climate change policy and legal framework which leaves project affected communities vulnerable to violations of their human rights. The case studies indicate that there are three common areas of concern with regard to ensuring the human rights of the project affected population:

* Participation: In all three case studies, there were shortcomings with regard ensuring the adequate participation and consultation of project-affected persons. Especially the inclusion of vulnerable groups such as indigenous peoples was a particular challenge.
* Migration/resettlement/relocation: Resettlement and relocation issues are a very sensitive issue. Problematic fields in this regard are the failure of providing an accurate initial data set or census for the planning or carrying out of resettlement processes, the lack of a structured planning of compensation measures, problems concerning the selection of sites for resettlement or the absence of drawing up and agreeing on a resettlement plan.
* Due diligence: Issues of concern relate to the problematic quality with regard to the content and the process of conducted environmental and social impact assessment as well as inadequate monitoring activities by the financing institutions.

1. <https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/NAPC/Documents%20NAP/The%20Austrian%20Strategy%20for%20Adaptation%20to%20Climate%20Change.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.bmk.gv.at/en/topics/climate-environment/climate-protection/austrian-strategy-adaptaion.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.bmk.gv.at/themen/klima_umwelt/klimaschutz/anpassungsstrategie/publikationen/oe_strategie.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)