# Country summary: Austria

## COVID-19 cases

Austria has recorded 40,040 COVID-19 cases and 777 related deaths[[1]](#footnote-1). Data was apparently not disaggregated by disability.

However, data was collected on COVID-19 cases in care homes, reporting:

* 923 infections in care homes for older people, with 260 deaths;
* 59 cases in care homes for persons with disabilities with 3 deaths[[2]](#footnote-2).

## Emergency, lockdown, and confinement

Austria did not declare a state of emergency; however, a nationwide lockdown was declared starting 16 March[[3]](#footnote-3).

The Government provided for some exceptions for persons with disabilities, including exempting persons with disabilities “incompatible” with the act of wearing a mask from doing so[[4]](#footnote-4).

During the lockdown several concerns were expressed against measures not taking into consideration the rights of persons with disabilities. For example the Austrian Ombudsman Board (Volksanwaltschaft), as well as the Platform for Disabled, Chronically Ill and Old People (Plattform behinderter, chronisch kranker und alter Menschen) and the Association for Seniors (Seniorenbund) criticised that the laws on social distancing took no special consideration of persons with disabilities or older people, who particularly suffer from isolation and feelings of loneliness[[5]](#footnote-5). Moreover, the Aid Association of the Blind and Visually Impaired reported that contact-tracing applications did not take into account the needs of persons with disabilities[[6]](#footnote-6) and the NGO Lebenshilfe criticised the lack of additional medical supplies, face masks and protective gear for organisations offering care for people with disabilities, impacting their right to health and to equal treatment[[7]](#footnote-7).

## Involvement of organisations of persons with disabilities

No formal consultations were held with DPOs, and there is an open statement condemning the fact that the crisis task forces did not include persons with disabilities or their representative organizations[[8]](#footnote-8). As far as steps taken by DPOs, the following actions were taken:

1. Letter from the Austrian Disability Council to BM Anschober: Additions and changes to the COVID-19 law[[9]](#footnote-9).
2. The national organisation, representing the interests of people with disabilities (Österreichischer Behindertenrat) – including intellectual disabilities – has called for entitlements for leave from work for family carers in light of closures of institutions and services that usually support people with disabilities during the day. They also called for strict use of protective equipment for family carers of people with disabilities and for people with disabilities themselves[[10]](#footnote-10).

## Communications and announcements

The following information was available in accessible formats:

* Videos in Austrian Sign Language on Facebook, by the Relay Austrian Federation for the Deaf[[11]](#footnote-11).
* News broadcast on Coronavirus available in sign language[[12]](#footnote-12).
* Update stream for persons with disabilities living in Vienna[[13]](#footnote-13).

## Institutions and closed settings

Austria collected data on COVID-19 cases in institutions and closed settings, as reported above. The data collected showed that compared to the total deaths linked to COVID-19 in Austria on the same date, deaths of care home residents would represent 34% of all deaths (data from the Austrian epidemiological alert system). At the end of 2018 there were 69,730 residents in care homes in Austria, using this as the denominator for the total number of care home residents, evaluated that 0.3% of care home residents would have died with COVID-19[[14]](#footnote-14).

For what concerns provisions regarding people in institutions and closed settings, Kurier newspaper reported that by the end of April or beginning of May, depending on province, visits to care and elderly homes would gradually be allowed again and, in fact, since 4th May, visits to care homes have been allowed again, though under specific security measures, e.g. visiting zones, definition of visiting times, registration, special hygiene, physical distancing, one visitor at a time, masks and/or plexiglass windows. Since 9th June, children have also again been allowed to visit people in care homes[[15]](#footnote-15).

Masks and security gear were scarce and often missing in care homes and especially in-home care. However, the government has since allocated €100 million in Long Term Care support fund to help regional governments find alternative sources of provision, if informal carers who provide more than 70% of all care, or migrant personal carers who cover about 6-7% of people in need of care, might drop out due to illness, travel restrictions or other reasons[[16]](#footnote-16). The Austria Ombudsman Board also launched an inquiry to investigate how well nursing and care homes coped during COVID-19[[17]](#footnote-17).

Finally, concerns were raised about prescribed isolation, loneliness and the fact that residents who left the care home had to remain 14 days in quarantine upon their return (9th April). The Austrian Ombudsman Board stated the need for creative solutions and measures to mitigate the negative consequences of isolation for people with (multiple) disabilities in care homes[[18]](#footnote-18). Moreover, during lockdown it was not possible for OPCAT Commissions[[19]](#footnote-19) to enter care homes, triggering a parliamentary inquiry[[20]](#footnote-20).

## Health care

No disability-related information was found, other than a recommendation regarding allocation of resources in intensive care unit in times of Covid-19[[21]](#footnote-21).

## Social Protection

In Austria, the Third COVID-19 Law of 4 April established a fund for families facing hardships (“Familenhärtefonds”). The fund includes 30 Million Euros and is run by the Federal Ministry of Labour, Family and Youth (Bundesministerium für Arbeit, Familie und Jugend). Regardless, The Austrian Anti-Poverty Network stated that the fund does not cater to families who require social assistance, who are part of the working poor, who are single parents, who have any form of disability, and who are in marginal employment (i.e. earning under roughly 460 Euros a month for which no tax or insurance must be paid.)[[22]](#footnote-22).

The Independent Monitoring Committee, the Council of People with Disabilities and the NGO Self-Determination Austria issued a press release voicing concerns about the availability of psychosocial services for women with disabilities who often face challenges including caring responsibilities, precarious work and isolation[[23]](#footnote-23).

Both parents and caretakers of persons with disabilities were entitled to three weeks of special holiday except if they work in an area related to basic needs[[24]](#footnote-24).

1. Bundesministerium, information available in German at: [https://www.sozialministerium.at/Informationen-zum-Coronavirus/Neuartiges-Coronavirus-(2019-nCov).html](https://www.sozialministerium.at/Informationen-zum-Coronavirus/Neuartiges-Coronavirus-%282019-nCov%29.html) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. International Long-term care policy network, Country reports: COVID-19 and Long-Term Care, 13 July 2020, available at: <https://ltccovid.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/The-COVID-19-Long-Term-Care-situation-in-Austria-13-July-1.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Euronews, Austria begins reopening after 'very early and very harsh' lockdown, available at: <https://www.euronews.com/2020/04/20/austria-begins-reopening-after-very-early-and-very-harsh-lockdown> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Information available in German at: <https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=20011162> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Information available on EDF’s website: <http://edf-feph.org/covid19austria> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Information available in German at: <https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20200603_OTS0074/corona-app-nicht-barrierefrei> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Information available on EDF’s website: <http://edf-feph.org/covid19austria> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Available in German at: <https://www.behindertenrat.at/2020/04/corona-krisenstaebe-schliessen-expertise-von-menschen-mit-behinderungen-aus/> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Available in German at : <https://www.behindertenrat.at/2020/05/pressekonferenz-mehr-sichtbarkeit-von-menschen-mit-behinderungen-in-krisenzeiten/> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. International Long-term care policy network, Country reports: COVID-19 and Long-Term Care, 13 July 2020, available at: <https://ltccovid.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/The-COVID-19-Long-Term-Care-situation-in-Austria-13-July-1.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=344625733155443> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. ORF, 12 March, available at: <https://www.bizeps.or.at/orf-tvthek-zeigt-gebaerdensprache-live-und-als-video-on-demand/?utm_source=BIZEPS+Newsletter&utm_campaign=dd97c49198-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_20180806_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_97d1b918c2-dd97c49198-85022611> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Bizeps, last updated 4 September 2020, available in German at: <https://www.bizeps.or.at/coronavirus-wichtige-informationen-fuer-menschen-mit-behinderungen-und-deren-angehoerige-in-wien/>

 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. International Long-term care policy network, Country reports: COVID-19 and Long-Term Care, 13 July 2020, available at: <https://ltccovid.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/The-COVID-19-Long-Term-Care-situation-in-Austria-13-July-1.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. International Long-term care policy network, Country reports: COVID-19 and Long-Term Care, 13 July 2020, available at: <https://ltccovid.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/The-COVID-19-Long-Term-Care-situation-in-Austria-13-July-1.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. International Long-term care policy network, Country reports: COVID-19 and Long-Term Care, 13 July 2020, available at: <https://ltccovid.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/The-COVID-19-Long-Term-Care-situation-in-Austria-13-July-1.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Information available in German at: <https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20200629_OTS0015/erinnerung-pflegeeinrichtungen-in-zeiten-der-corona-pandemie-pk-am-1-juli> [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Coronavirus pandemic in the EU - Fundamental Rights Implications - Bulletin 1, available at: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2020/covid19-rights-impact-april-1> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. The ‘Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment‘ (OPCAT) has been implemented in many countries by respective Commissions to ensure compliance, e.g. in care homes. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. International Long-term care policy network, Country reports: COVID-19 and Long-Term Care, 13 July 2020, available at: <https://ltccovid.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/The-COVID-19-Long-Term-Care-situation-in-Austria-13-July-1.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Available in German at: <https://www.who.int/ethics/topics/outbreaks-emergencies/200402_Covid_Bioethik.pdf?ua=1> [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Coronavirus pandemic in the EU - Fundamental Rights Implications - Bulletin 2, available at: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2020/covid19-rights-impact-may-1> [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Coronavirus pandemic in the EU - Fundamental Rights Implications, Bulletin 3, available at: <https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-coronavirus-pandemic-eu-bulletin-june_en.pdf> and in german: <https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20200528_OTS0016/corona-krise-situationen-von-frauen-mit-behinderungen-beachten> [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Coronavirus pandemic in the EU - Fundamental Rights Implications - Bulletin 1, available at: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2020/covid19-rights-impact-april-1> [↑](#footnote-ref-24)