

Submission for a talk or poster presentation  
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## **Theme 2 Family & Household**

### **Demographic and Socio-Economic Profiles of Same-Sex Couples in Austria**

Extended Abstract

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Family and fertility research has long centered on heterosexual couples but is increasingly addressing LGBTIQ+ individuals and same-sex couples. Still, there is insufficient representative evidence on most countries' sexual minority populations (Reczek 2020). In Austria, register data became first available for research in 2022, opening up new possibilities for research. I will present initial results from the project "Same-Sex Families in Austria" (SAMFA), the first to use these new data to gain insights on same-sex couples (SSCs) with and without children in Austria.

The family life of same-sex parent families and couples in Austria has been subject to major policy changes in the last 15 years: from the introduction of registered partnership (2010), to step-child adoption (2013), opening reproductive technology for female same-sex couples (2015) to marriage equality (2019). With these changes, same-sex families now have the same options for official recognition as different-sex families have traditionally had. While parenthood is still more difficult to reach for male SSCs, female SSCs have access to (some) reproductive technologies. Since 2024, the non-birthing parent can be recorded in the birth certificate without the prior requirement of going through a fertility clinic.

Even with these changes, same-sex families face specific challenges compared to heterosexual parents and their children: Attitudes towards queer people and same-sex parenthood in Austria are still rather conservative (EVS 2022; European Commission 2019) and LGBTIQ+ people face a high risk of individual and structural discrimination (Haines et al. 2018; European Commission 2023). At the same time, there is little reliable information on the population of same-sex families in Austria. The project presented here aims to take first steps in obtaining such information as a basis for future research and political decision making.

Using administrative register data from 2010 onwards provided by the Austrian Micro Data Center (AMDC) (Fuchs et al. 2024), the characteristics female and male same-sex couples who are married or in a registered partnership with and without children as well as unmarried same-sex parents can be examined. Same-sex couples can be identified in administrative household data by registered partnerships and marriages, when having children together and by Statistics Austria's Family Identifier. The data contains information on demographic and socio-economic characteristics - such as marriages and divorces, registered partnerships and dissolutions, births and number of children, age, education, household income, migration/citizenship, deaths - that can be linked to individuals across different registers. Even though this data does not contain information on individual sexuality or gender identity, it covers the whole population, thus providing sufficient numbers of minority groups.

This analysis applies an exploratory approach, answering questions such as: How did the number of same-sex couples in registered partnerships and marriage change over the last 15 years? How did numbers of registered partnerships, marriages, as well as dissolutions of partnerships and divorces change over time (with regards to changing family policy)? What is the age of same-sex couples at marriage compared to different-sex couples? How many couples live with children and how many children grow up with a same-sex couple? Is equality in income differences and employment patterns higher in same-sex couples?

Much of what we know to date about the topics of unions and parenthood in SSCs stems from two decades of register data-based research from Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands, Finland and Denmark. Studies have shown that same-sex partner selection leads to larger differences in age

within the couple and more couples with different migration/citizenship status than in heterosexual couples (Andersson et al. 2006; Wiik et al. 2014). In Nordic countries, partners in SSC are more often highly educated, especially women, than those in DSCs. A higher share of female SSCs consists of partners in which both have tertiary education compared to male SSCs and DSCs (Andersson and Noack 2011; Wiik et al. 2014).

Expected findings on SSCs in Austria might differ from these previous results due to the more conservative general attitudes in the population and differences in policies. Lesbian, gay and bisexual people face higher discrimination in Austria than in the Nordic countries (European Commission 2019), possibly leading to minority stress (Frost et al. 2017; Meyer 2003). One example of a policy difference is the financial support Sweden offers couples for the use of reproductive technologies for a first child while the cost of such treatments have to be privately covered in Austria (IFFS 2022). The relatively short timeframe since marriage was introduced for SSCs in Austria – in 2019 – may lead to higher differences in socioeconomic and demographic outcomes between SSCs and DSC in comparison to studies from Nordic countries and the Netherlands. More recent results on the 30 years of registered partnership and 15 years of marriage in Sweden show increasingly similar trends of formal partnership formation and dissolution in SSC and DSC. Both numbers of same-sex marriages and divorce risks seem to converge towards those of DSCs (Kolk and Andersson 2020). There are also indications for a generational shift in pathways to parenthood for lesbian and gay people, away from previous parenthood in heterosexual relationships to a same-sex relationship towards reproductive technologies, adoption or fostering (Tasker and Lavender-Stott 2020; Reczek 2020; Patterson and Tornello 2010). Adding results from Austria to this existing research from Nordic countries gives us insights into the effects that living in a politically conservative country could have on same-sex families.

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