



Written submission on the call for input on  
the impact of mental health challenges on  
the enjoyment of human rights by young  
people

Submitted on the occasion of the 66<sup>rd</sup> session  
Of the Human Rights Council

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The report at hand is mostly based on documents from the Austrian Disability Council, the umbrella organization of over 85 member organisations representing approximately 1.4 million persons with disabilities in Austria. These documents on a broad range of topics relate to the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the life of persons with disabilities in Austria.

**1. What are the main mental health challenges faced by young people in your country and what is the impact on their human rights? Please consider the specific situation of marginalized young people and those in vulnerable situations in your response.**

Studies show that the mental health of children and young persons has deteriorated significantly in recent years - especially since the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>1</sup> A report shows that one-seventh of all children and young persons in the European Union live with a mental illness, with girls disproportionately affected.<sup>2</sup> These heightened psychological burdens are compounded by a shortage of both outpatient and inpatient care services (for details, see the response to question 3).

The situation of young persons with disabilities is particularly precarious, as they face additional structural barriers and discrimination. From early childhood, many children with disabilities are structurally excluded from the education system and placed in segregated institutions or classrooms. This begins with special needs kindergarten groups – which exclusively serve children with disabilities – and continues in special schools. Despite extensive criticism from the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Austrian state consistently maintains this segregated education system and has even rolled back inclusive education in recent years.<sup>3</sup>

The separate education systems further perpetuate prejudices against persons with disabilities, as opportunities for interaction between children with and without disabilities are prevented, thereby hindering the ability of (young) persons with disabilities to live fully included in society. This social exclusion has a profound negative impact on mental health.

Even outside the education system, there is a lack of opportunities for interaction in the form of inclusive leisure activities. Many arts and cultural sectors remain largely inaccessible, and there is a shortage of comprehensive, needs-based personal assistance that would enable adolescents and young adults with disabilities to actually participate in these activities. Social participation, cultural experiences, and self-determined leisure activities are particularly crucial in young age for personal development, mental health, and social integration.

In summary, it can be observed that ableist attitudes and persistent prejudices against persons with disabilities, particularly young persons with disabilities, have a significant impact on mental health. These challenges are further exacerbated by the rise of online

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<sup>1</sup> Gesundheit Österreich GmbH, Maßnahmen zur Stärkung der psychosozialen Gesundheit von Kindern, Jugendlichen und jungen Erwachsenen, R. Felder-Puig, B. Lindner, I. Vana, L. Schlee, G. Rohrauer-Näf, (2023) S.2.

<sup>2</sup> World Health Organization, Child and youth mental health in the WHO European Region (2025) ix, [content](#) (last accessed: 13.02.2026).

<sup>3</sup> CRPD/C/AUT/CO/2-3, S. 10 (57a).

hate.<sup>4</sup> Digital spaces, which should ideally provide opportunities for exchange and participation - especially for young people - thus become sites of devaluation, exclusion, and discrimination for many young people with disabilities

**1. What steps is the Government taking to address the root causes of the mental health challenges that young people face and ensure that young people's human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled in this context? Please consider the specific situation of marginalized young people and those in vulnerable situations in your response.**

There are isolated initiatives, but these are insufficient. As a result, the incidence of mental health illnesses continues to rise, while long waiting times for treatment and significant resource shortages further strain the care situation. The increasing demand for child and adolescent psychiatric as well as therapeutic services highlights the existing gaps in Austria's healthcare provision. Low-threshold services and timely appointment allocation are therefore essential, as prolonged waiting times are often associated with a deterioration of symptoms and the overall health of patients.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, there is still a lack of reliable data on persons with disabilities, especially on children and young persons with disabilities, which makes planning and improving care even more difficult.

**2. What are the main barriers to the right to mental health for young people in your country and what is their impact on young people's human rights? Please consider the availability, accessibility, acceptability, and quality of mental health care and the specific situation of marginalized young people and those in vulnerable situations in your response.**

The right to mental health is enshrined in Article 25 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as part of the right to health. However, there are still significant structural deficits for young persons, particularly with regard to the availability and accessibility of appropriate care services. In August 2023, during its review of Austria, the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities pointed out that these deficits are particularly serious, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Particular emphasis was placed on the inadequate psychotherapeutic care for children and young persons with

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<sup>4</sup> CEDAW/C/AUT/CO/9, 5 (20). This aspect was also highlighted by the Human Rights Committee in its concluding observations to Austria in 2015 (Human Rights Committee, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Austria 2015 (CCPR/C/AUT/CO/5) 3 (15).

<sup>5</sup> C. Kienbacher, Psychische Gesundheit im Kindes- und Jugendalter, Kindheit und Jugend, Seelische Gesundheit von Kindern und Jugendlichen, 494 (12/2017).

disabilities and the lack of reliable data on the effects of these gaps in care.<sup>6</sup> Austria was therefore called upon to significantly improve access to psychotherapeutic care for persons with disabilities, especially children and youth.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, there is a fundamental shortage of specialist staff in the field of child and youth psychiatry, as well as insufficient transitions between child and adult psychiatry in some cases. Both physical and communicative barriers continue to make it difficult for many persons with disabilities to access medical care.

### **3. What laws, policies and programmes exist in your country concerning the mental health of young people?**

In addition to political strategies that address various issues relating to children and young persons - including mental health - such as the "Child and Youth Health Strategy"<sup>8</sup> launched in 2011 or the "Austrian Youth Strategy"<sup>9</sup> of the Federal Chancellery, there are also counseling services such as "Rat auf Draht" or "feel-ok", which all children and young persons can access both online and by telephone.<sup>10</sup>

The number of school psychologists<sup>11</sup> and mental health counseling services, such as the extended "Gesund aus der Krise" project by the Austrian Ministry of Social Affairs, has also been expanded, not least due to the increased demand following the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences.

It is not clear how many children and young persons with disabilities are actually reached by these services. As already mentioned, there are still far too few places in child and youth psychiatry. In addition, there is a significant lack of psychological and psychosocial counseling services for children and young persons with disabilities.

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<sup>6</sup> CRPD/C/AUT/CO/2-3, S. 13 (59a).

<sup>7</sup> CRPD/C/AUT/CO/2-3, S. 13 (60a).

<sup>8</sup> BMSGPK, Kinder- und Jugendgesundheitsstrategie (2024)

[https://broschuerenservice.sozialministerium.gv.at/Home/Download?publicationId=846&attachmentName=Kinder\\_und\\_Jugendgesundheitsstrategie.pdf](https://broschuerenservice.sozialministerium.gv.at/Home/Download?publicationId=846&attachmentName=Kinder_und_Jugendgesundheitsstrategie.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> BKA, Österreichische Jugendstrategie im Bundeskanzleramt

<sup>10</sup> GÖG, Maßnahmen zur Stärkung der psychosozialen Gesundheit von Kindern, Jugendlichen und jungen Erwachsenen – Factsheet (2023) 7. Siehe [https://www.feel-ok.at/de\\_AT/jugendliche/jugendliche.cfm](https://www.feel-ok.at/de_AT/jugendliche/jugendliche.cfm)

<sup>11</sup> PK vom 02.07.2025 von BM Wiederkehr, BM Plakolm, BM Schumann: „Verdoppelung der Schulpsycholog\*innen“, Einführung der Schulsozialarbeit in Bundesschulen. GÖG, Maßnahmen, 6. BMB, Schulpsychologie – Kontaktadressen, <https://www.bmb.gv.at/Themen/schule/beratung/psych/kontakte.html>

**4. What proportion of total public expenditure is allocated to health, specifically to mental health services for young people? In particular, please indicate any changes (including cuts or increases) in funding for programmes and services addressing youth mental health.**

Public and private health expenditures rose to approximately € 57 million in 2024, representing an increase of 8.3% compared to 2023.<sup>12</sup> However, a detailed breakdown by sector, for example for psychological health services, is not available. The 2025 Court of Audit report, however, clearly states that mental health care for children and adolescents remains inadequate despite the resources provided.<sup>13</sup>

**5. How can States deliver more effectively to ensure the full and effective realization of young people's human right to mental health, including through international cooperation? Please share any promising practices.**

In addition to raising awareness of the importance of mental health in children and young persons and the far-reaching consequences of mental illness at the social, economic, and political levels, it is important to implement concrete political measures that are equipped with adequate funding.

In Austria, there is hardly any data available on the mental health of children and young persons with disabilities. In addition to greater visibility that robust statistical data brings, it also highlights the need for political measures such as the creation of free and needs-based psychotherapy places and clinical psychological diagnosis and treatment.<sup>14</sup> In addition, child and youth psychiatry must be massively expanded, as well as free mobile social psychiatric care.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Statistik Austria, Gesundheitsausgaben, [Gesundheitsausgaben - STATISTIK AUSTRIA - Die Informationsmanager](#), (zuletzt aufgerufen am 20.02.2026).

<sup>13</sup> Bericht des Rechnungshofs, Kinder- und Jugendpsychiatrie – Versorgungsplanung und Umsetzung (2025) 79 ff.

<sup>14</sup> Siehe Pro Mente Austria, [https://www.promenteaustria.at/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/240610\\_promente\\_Flugblatt.pdf](https://www.promenteaustria.at/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/240610_promente_Flugblatt.pdf) (zugegriffen am 12.02.2026).

<sup>15</sup> Siehe Rechnungshof Österreich (Hrsg.), Kinder- und Jugendpsychiatrie. Versorgungsplanung und Umsetzung (2025) 83 ff., [https://www.rechnungshof.gv.at/rh/home/home/2025\\_28\\_Kinder\\_Jugendpsychiatrie.pdf](https://www.rechnungshof.gv.at/rh/home/home/2025_28_Kinder_Jugendpsychiatrie.pdf) (zuletzt aufgerufen am 12.02.2026).