VCÖ
MOBILITÄT MIT ZUKUNFT

VCÖ factsheet

More space for active and child-friendly mobility

Destinations within walking distance, inviting public spaces as well as safe and attractive walking and cycling paths are determinants of active travel behaviour. A well-connected network of routes to school and leisure activities contributes to more healthy exercise among children and young people.

Physical inactivity is a major health risk and is directly related to a wide variety of diseases. The prevalence of cardiovascular diseases or type 2 diabetes is significantly higher in physically inactive people. A lack of physical activity is also associated with a higher risk of sleep disorders and mental diseases.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that adults should undertake at least 150 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous intensity physical activity per week, while children and adolescents should engage in at least 60 minutes per day, a significantly higher level.

Implementing a child-friendly transport system

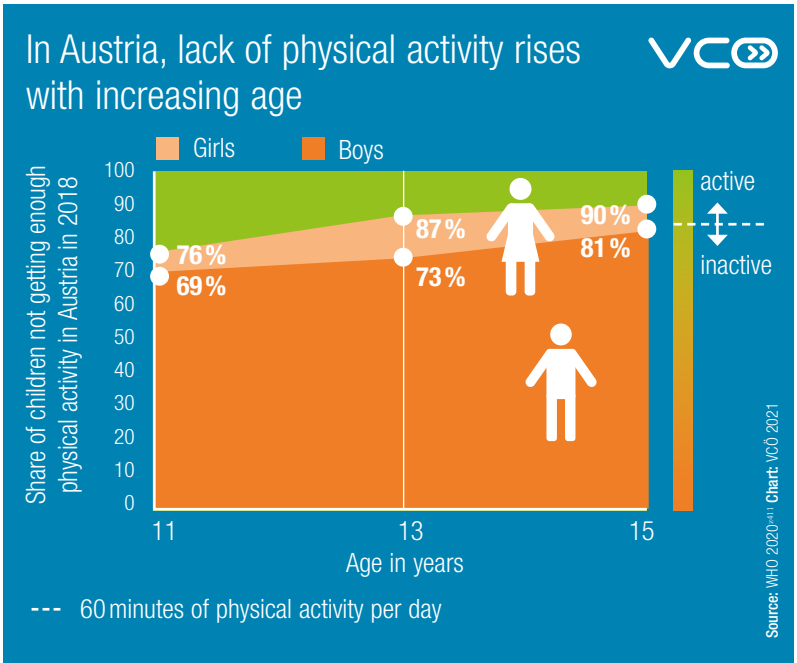
Active everyday mobility is key to achieving the recommended level of physical activity. However, the space available for active travel is often insufficient, as we have also learnt during the Covid-19 pandemic. In Austria, children aged 6 to 14 years are making one third of their daily journeys on foot or by bike, another third is taking public transport and one third is driven by car. Among those aged 15 to 19 years, the share of journeys made by car rises to 40 percent, while the share of journeys walked or cycled drops to 17 percent.

Examples of new mobility

Safe travel to school

When the primary school in Sierndorf, Lower Austria, was renovated, special emphasis was placed on child-friendly mobility. Children were asked about their wishes regarding their routes to school. The bus stops were evaluated, pick-up and drop-off points as well as covered bicycle and scooter parking facilities were put in place. Children collected „Klimameilen" (green footprints) and a school festival centred on climate-friendly mobility was organised. The changes to the school routes were discussed and practised in a walking group. In the Oberlangkampfen primary school (Tyrol), the high number of parents driving their kids to school caused problems. Together with local authorities, a set of measures was developed, road and pavement markings were improved, speed signs were installed, a 30 km/h speed limit campaign was launched and a new space for parents to drop off their children was established. Raising awareness through step counters, "Klimameilen" and a big mobility festival completed the programme. The klimaaktiv mobil programme is currently advising around 70 schools and kindergartens on optimising mobility for the duration of one school year.

In Austria, 15-year-old kids are significantly less active than 11-year-olds. And there are big differences between girls and boys.



Children and adolescents get too little exercise in everyday life. A WHO report found that 81 percent of adolescents in Europe do not meet the recommendation of at least one hour of physical activity per day. In Austria, only 17 percent of those aged 11-17 years meet this recommendation. Proper amounts of physical activity have positive effects on the cardiovascular system, the musculoskeletal system, muscular fitness and a healthy body weight and improve academic performance and mental health.

Active everyday mobility as a health factor

In Austria, girls and boys increasingly fail to meet the recommended levels of physical activity as they grow older. With 3.5 days vs. 4.5 days a week, girls meet the recommended minimum of 60 minutes of physical activity per day less often than boys. Moreover, 21 to 30 percent of all schoolchildren in Austria are overweight or obese. Childhood obesity is one of the most serious global public health challenges. Since 1980, the number of school-age children and adolescents classed as obese has risen more than 10-fold, from 11 million to 124 million. In addition to the increased risk of disease, childhood obesity also has effects on the development of motor, cognitive and social skills.

Active everyday mobility is an area of considerable potential for sufficient healthy physical activity for children and adolescents.

Infrastructure influences mobility patterns

WHO emphasises that active play and recreation time are important indicators for the healthy development of children and adolescents. The design of school routes and school environments, as well as mobility programmes implemented directly in the classrooms, are regarded as particularly important measures. Apart from the school environment, measures promoting physical activity in everyday life, for example in the home environment or in recreational places, should be improved. Play and roaming areas are particularly important motivation factors for children and adolescents to engage in active and independent mobility. The loss of roaming areas and the fragmentation of children's everyday spaces can result in children participating less in public life, having fewer opportunities for social

exchange and being more dependent on shuttle services. A decrease in physical activity and independent active mobility will also be detrimental in terms of learning how to deal with road traffic situations and thus increase uncertainties and the risk of accidents

Measures for a safe school environment were tested in Tilburg, the Netherlands, from 2018 to 2020. A so-called School Environment Scan was developed as a way of involving children in the creation of the school environment. Many Austrian cities also established „school streets", where cars are banned at drop-off and pick-up times. In Vienna, these school streets have had a demonstrably positive effect on the mobility behaviour of children and adolescents, increasing active mobility on the way to school.

Child-friendly road networks improve conditions for all population groups

A network of roads designed to meet the needs of children and adolescents is an indicator of successful spatial planning and settlement development. By providing a health-promoting environment, it creates an enhanced quality of life for all population and age groups. Ideally, there should be a coherent road network of limited-traffic zones, such as residential streets and school streets, shared space and pedestrian zones, barrier-free pavements and safe main roads linking the most important places for children and adolescents. In theory, residential streets offer good prerequisites for this purpose; however, in practice, they are not perceived as places for people to stay due to a lack of redesign and parked cars. Traffic planning that promotes active mobility for children will take measures to reduce car traffic, introduce urban speed limits of 30 km/h instead of 50 km/h and create high-visibility and safe crossing facilities. Countries like the Netherlands and Spain have demonstrated that it is possible to implement 30 km/h speed limits in urban areas. In 2020, the Dutch Parliament decided to introduce a default speed limit of 30 km/h in urban areas. In Spain, the general traffic regulations will be amended as of May 2021: 20 km/h on single-lane roads with no physical barrier between road and pavement, and 30 km/h on roads with one lane in each direction.

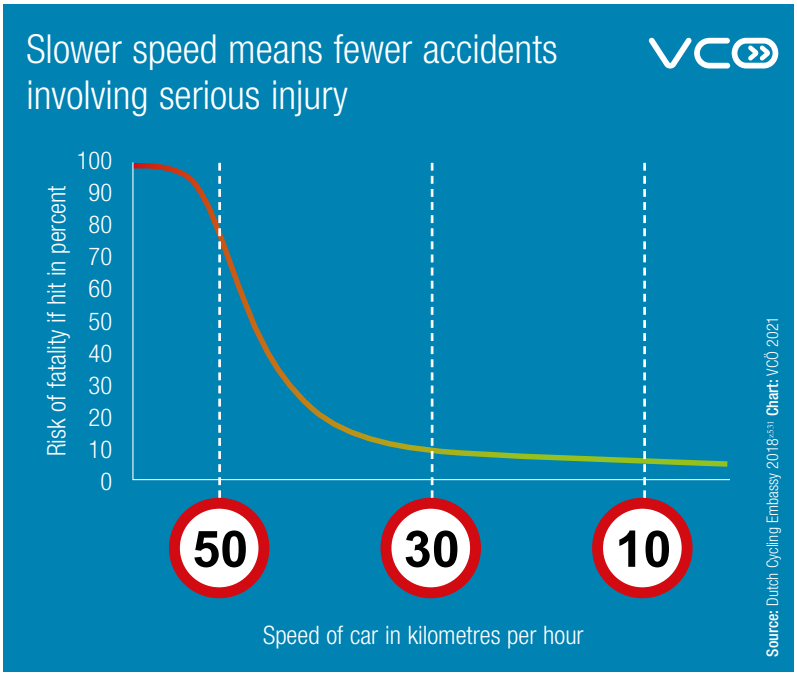
Green areas and attractive public recreational areas fostering free play and social contacts are also important for children. In such places, wide paths and suitable surfaces are important to ensure that inline skates, scooters and skateboards, which are very popular with children and young people, can be used.

Examples of new mobility

Bike motor skills park for children and young people-

The Radvokaten association teamed up with the City of Vienna to implement the Radmotorikpark Kaisermühlen, a bike park that offers a bike course catering for children and young people on a site of about 8,000 square metres. The bike playground gives young riders a safe place to learn how to master everyday obstacles such as sleepers, rails, narrow sections or cobblestones without stress. In this environment, children and young people can train their motor skills on the bike, for instance, and learn how to stay on track even under difficult conditions. These exercises increase everyday road safety. The bike motor skills park, which is accessible all year round, is designed for almost all non-motorised vehicles.

A generally slower speed of vehicle traffic is important. At a speed of 30 km/h, the risk of a fatal injury is 75 percent lower than at 50 km/h.



Promoting children's active mobility

In Austria, 2,075 square kilometres of land, which is roughly the size of East Tyrol, were taken up by motor vehicle traffic in 2019. While everyday car use reinforces a sedentary lifestyle, active everyday mobility compensates for the increasing lack of physical activity. Cycling and walking are not only ways to get around a city; cycling and walking for leisure also offers pleasure, recreation and social exchange. The potential of a settlement area to meet all of the basic needs of the residents in the immediate vicinity and to facilitate identification with the neighbourhood is largely based on a connected, dense road network for active mobility, while the separation effect and the excessive speed of motor vehicle traffic impair the overall conditions for active mobility.

Slower speed promotes active mobility

Reducing urban speed limits to 30 km/h is a measure that is urgently needed to improve the quality of life and encourage active mobility. People avoid places where cars are driven at high speeds, and high traffic speed discourages walking and cycling. The Netherlands and Spain have demonstrated that 30 km/h speed limits in urban areas can be implemented. These are good examples for any future amendment to the road traffic regulations in Austria. Experience shows that ambitious decisions targeted on more livable public spaces also pay off in terms of public acceptance. The redesign of Mariahilfer Straße in Vienna is a good example for this, as well as the re-election of Paris mayoress Anne Hidalgo in 2020, who won with an ambitious programme centring on active mobility and a greener city environment.

Source: VCÖ, "Mehr Platz für bewegungsaktive Mobilität", publication series "Mobilität mit Zukunft", Vienna 2021

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VCÖ recommendations

More space and high-quality infrastructure are key for increased active mobility

- Active everyday mobility should be used as an important remedy against the lack of movement typical of our modern lifestyle.
- Pavements with a width of at least two metres and wide cycling paths physically separated from motor vehicle traffic are the minimum requirements for an attractive environment that promotes walking and cycling.
- The physical distance rules necessary to combat the Covid-19 pandemic have clearly demonstrated that there is not enough public space available for active mobility at the moment.

A child-friendly transport system benefits everyone

- Active and independent travel to kindergarten or school and also during leisure time is a key factor for children's development and health.
- A traffic infrastructure promoting the safe and independent active mobility of children improves the liveability of public spaces for all population groups.

Michael Schwendinger, VCÖ - Mobility with a future:
"There is a lot to be said for more active mobility. This is true for all of us, but particularly so for children. However, public space has to provide room for active mobility. Because the way children travel will shape the choice of transport in their future lives."

In 2021, funding for active mobility measures in the amount of EUR 40 million is available within the framework of klimaaktiv mobil. For the first time, walking measures are also eligible for funding. The funding programme is aimed especially at cities and municipalities for the construction of safe walking and cycling infrastructures.
For a free consultation, please contact:
klimaaktivmobil.at

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