

THE AUSTRIAN-CZECH BORDER REGION – REGIONAL ANALYSIS

The following regional analysis focuses on the cross border region as defined in the chapter “Programme area” The analysis serves as a possibility to find a joint picture of the programming region concerning structure, development process, challenges and risks on the one hand and on the other hand as a basis for the formulation of the strategy and development objectives. When available complete harmonised EUROSTAT data was used, otherwise national data was used as the basis for the analysis. Due to different national collection methods a joint view on some indicators for the entire region was not possible.

General characteristics

Landscape and settlement structure

The Austrian – Czech border region covers an area of 49,738 km² and offers a variety of very different landscapes. The Western part of the border region (*Jihočeský kraj, Mühlviertel, parts of Waldviertel*) is characterized by the low mountain range of one of the oldest geological formations in Europe *Český les, Šumava, Českomoravská vrchovina and Novohradské hory*. The Danube valley forms the southern boundary of this part. Towards the Eastern part (*Waldviertel, Weinviertel, Kraj Vysočina, Jihomoravský kraj*) the landscape changes into the hills and the granite and gneiss highlands, valleys and lowlands. The Carpathian region forms the border in the Southeast. *Moravský kras* as one of the most significant karst areas in the central Europe and the northern *Wiener Becken* (which consists of the natural areas of *Marchfeld* and *Weinviertel*), a depression between the Alps are special landscape formations. For the border region, the rivers are also very important landscape features. The most important river systems are the Danube, the Thaya/Dyje and the March/Morava.

Approximately 6 million people lived in the entire border region in 2004/5. The **rural character** of the border region becomes manifest in the settlement structures and in the importance of agriculture for the regional or local economy. The border region is characterised by villages and small and medium sized towns. More than 60% of the settlements are villages with a population below 2.000 inhabitants. This numerous medium and small-sized cities in the region function as regional centres and are the driving forces behind regional economic development due to their traditional economic structures and the new impulses in the service sector. The regional structure and development differs within the rural parts of the border region: The regions close to the urban centres are mostly dynamic in demographic or economic terms while the peripheral parts far away and poorly connected to the economic centres are losing population and jobs.

The biggest towns are *Wien* (1,6 Mio.), *Linz* (184.000), *St. Pölten* (50.000), *Brno* (380.000), *České Budějovice* (100.000) and *Jihlava* (50.000). These cities are the administrative, economic and cultural centres of the region. In terms of size (demographic, economic), institutional measures (capital of

Austria, status of a “*Bundesland*”), urban problems and challenges *Wien* takes a special position within the region.¹

The existing settlement structures and the economic development in the region influences the urban – rural dependencies.

In all urban agglomerations the suburbanisation process is a visible trend accompanied by increasing traffic, land use and costs for (re)building or improving the technical and social infrastructure.

On the other side the (highly populated) cities are subject to fundamental socio-economic changes. In urban areas the environmental, economic and social dimensions meet most strongly and the challenges facing cities have significant consequences for the population structure (e.g. migration flows etc.), the quality of life of urban citizens (e.g. transport, housing, social services etc.), human health and the economic performance of the cities.

Table 1: **The Austrian-Czech Border region**

Regional unit	Area in km ²	Inhabitants 2005 (AT)/ 2004 (CZ)		Population
		Total	Women	density (inh./km ²)
Nuts III region				
Border region – AT	24.216	3.811.106	1.965.026	157,4
Border region – CZ	24.048	2.266.066	1.158.371	94,2
Border region – total	48.264	6.077.172	3.123.397	125,9
Border region without Vienna	47.849	4.450.732	2.271.540	93,0
Austria (total)	83.871	8.206.524	4.220.228	97,8
Czech republic (total)	78.868	10.220.577	5.239.664	129,6

Sources: Statistics Austria, Czech Statistical Office

Demography

With some exceptions population numbers distinctly declined for decades in both the Austrian and the Czech border region. This decrease in population primarily affected the rural parts of the region in the immediate vicinity of the border. Only since the early 1990s a reversal of this trend has been noted in many municipalities.

The most important demographic trends in the border region are:

- Ageing population
- Increasing population due to migration
- Decreasing fertility rates
- Suburbanisation processes

¹ Referring to this specific situation most of the data is shown for the whole border region and for the border region without Vienna. As the indicators show the integration of Vienna as the dominant urban agglomeration falsifies the real situation in this border region.

The demographic development process in the Czech border region is determined by various factors and is similar to those of the whole population in the Czech Republic. From a long-term perspective the Czech border regions show by nature a negative population development. However, in last years the population number increases in some parts (e.g. *Jihočeský kraj*), due to the migration.

The demographic development in Austria also proceeds in an inhomogeneous way. While the central regions develop very dynamic, increase in the peripheral regions is weak or negative. Following a long-term trend the most dynamic regions are those near the urban centres or those with a very positive migration balance. Problematic trends can be observed in rural parts of the region in the immediate vicinity of the border. Due to migration the number of citizens increased in *Wien*.

The suburbanisation tendencies have been on the rise around the urban agglomerations like *Wien*, *Brno* and *Linz*. On the other hand most of the cities are confronted with a decreasing population or a less dynamic development, the surrounding areas account for very high growth rates. Especially those regions where the links to the public transportation system have been improved or intensive functional labour market exists were affected by the extraordinary increase in population.

As far as the age structure is concerned, the situation appears to be a bit more favourable on the Czech side of the border. The share of under 15-year olds accounts to 14,7% to 20,3% in the Austrian regions and to 14,8% and 16,0% in the Czech border regions. The shares of people older than 65 years are lower in the Czech part of the border region. The highest shares are displayed for northern peripheral regions of *Niederösterreich* and in *Wien*.