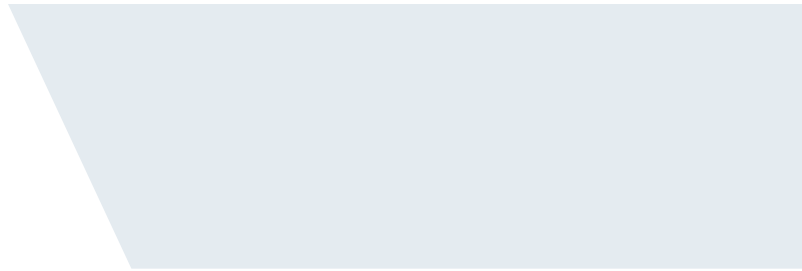




COEXISTENCE IN AUSTRIA

2nd, updated edition



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In this publication, emphasis was placed on gender-neutral wording. If this is not the case in certain places, it is solely for the sake of better readability and does not in any way express discrimination against any gender.

It is expressly pointed out that all information in this publication, despite the greatest care taken in collecting it, is subject to correction and that any liability on the part of the Austrian Federal Chancellery is excluded.

Vienna, 2024

Preliminary remark

This brochure is written for all people living in Austria. In particular, it is intended to serve as a guide to new immigrants on the foundational values of the Austrian Federal Constitution. The first edition of this publication was published in 2013. The new edition places greater emphasis on the topics of gender equality, security and belonging/home. The publication also aims to contribute towards the objective discussion of societal debates on fundamental values and Austrian cultural identity.

Dear Reader,

Our social coexistence in Austria is based on a clear basic consensus. This is reflected not only in our legal system, but also in our daily interactions with one another. It makes Austria a safe and peaceful country with a high standard of living. These are the best conditions for people living here to identify with Austria and feel responsible for the future of this country.

Our unifying way of life and everyday culture is based on Austrian and European values. They are expressed through societal “togetherness” rather than a “side-by-side” or even “against each other” approach. For people who immigrate to Austria, accepting our way of life is an important step towards integration – because integration also means adaptation. This enables Austria to be perceived as home without someone denying their own roots.

This brochure is intended as a guide to the cultural foundations that underpin our daily interactions. Reading the publication should also be an opportunity to reflect on questions relating to successful social coexistence in a modern society. Everyone in this country can make an important contribution toward this.

I wish you every success in your future endeavours in Austria!



MMag. Dr. Susanne Raab
Federal Minister for Women, Family Affairs, Integration and the Media
in the Federal Chancellery



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Basis: Human dignity

Everyone deserves respect from the outset, regardless of gender, age, education, religion, origin or appearance.

Every human being is equal when it comes to dignity. We have this human dignity from the beginning of life – it is not a quality that we have or do not have, but it arises solely from our existence as human beings. Everyone has different talents, strengths and weaknesses. Yet we all have the right to be treated with respect and dignity. This is why we should extend the same respect and fairness to others that we wish to receive ourselves.

Every human being is equal when it comes to dignity.

Respect for human dignity is the foundation of everything we do.

All people are equal when it comes to dignity. A person's dignity is independent of gender, age, education, religion, origin or appearance. There is no room for discrimination and racism in Austria.

Women and men are equal. Their word has the same value in court and their vote the same value in democratic elections. Children also have rights and are especially protected by the state. Respect for human dignity requires non-violent interaction with one another, especially in the family.



This does not only apply to interactions with each other. The state must also respect and protect human dignity and the equal treatment for all citizens that can be derived from this. Therefore, all decisions made by courts and authorities are based on the equality of everyone before the law. Respect for human dignity requires the state to treat people in the same situation equally.

Just as the principle of human dignity underlies our constitutional order, it also forms the basis for our social coexistence.



Human dignity is inviolable.

First principle: Freedom.

I decide about myself,
my opinion and my
life. In doing so, I show
consideration for the
world around me.

Freedom can be a feeling, such as that experienced during sport and in the great outdoors.

But freedom also means using it responsibly for yourself and your fellow human beings and, of course, recognising, respecting and honouring this freedom in all other people.

The freedom of expression is also an expression of this: you have the freedom to have your own opinion and to express this publicly – your fellow human beings have the freedom not to share this opinion.

In Austria you also have the right to choose your spouse freely, for example. Forced marriages are prohibited in Austria.

*Freedom requires responsibility
and self-discipline.*



My freedom ends where the freedom of others begins.

Freedom requires responsibility and self-discipline.

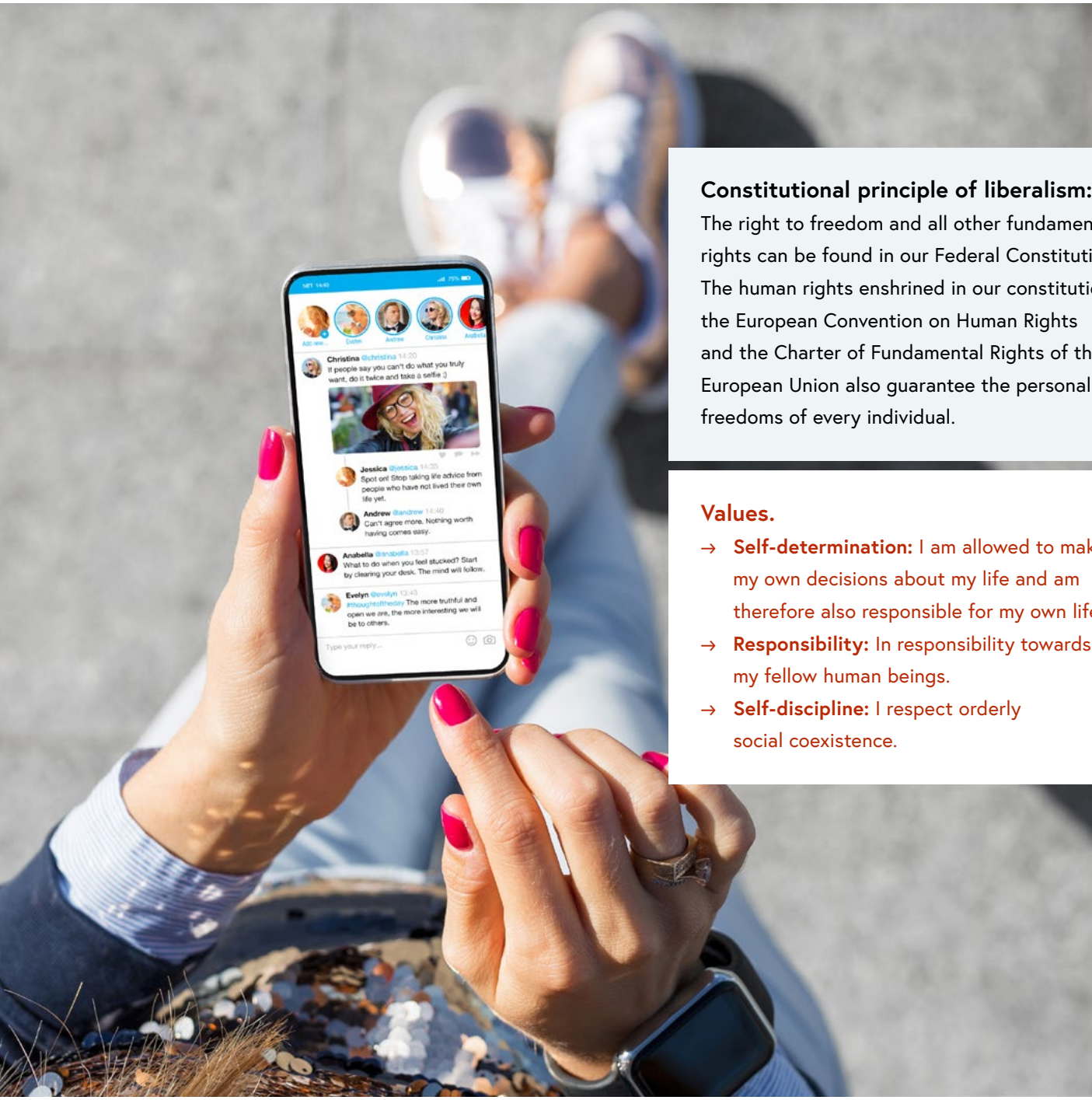
In Austria, all people have personal freedom and the right to determine the course of their own lives. You decide for yourself how you want to behave and act within the framework of the legal options. You also decide for yourself the course of your life, your profession or your religion and also have the right to leave a religious community. These are just a few examples of what personal freedom and self-determination can mean.

At the same time, however, self-determination entails a great deal of responsibility for each individual. On the one hand, personal responsibility includes how well you take care of your own health or which educational opportunities you choose to pursue. On the other, self-determination also means taking responsibility for others, ensuring that you respect the freedom of others, which is

as important as your own. This requires self-discipline in dealing with your own needs and interests. This can also mean that you have to take a step back to give others their space. One particularly important aspect of self-determination is the empowerment of women. Women in Austria have the freedom to choose their own paths in life and to pursue their personal and professional goals. They can take legal action if they experience social restrictions or discrimination.

The freedom of the individual naturally also has limits, which are defined by the law. Religion and the state are therefore separate from each other. Religion does not provide the foundation for state laws. And religious rules do not take precedence over state laws. Furthermore, the freedom of each individual to live out diversity must not be misused, e.g. to practice forms of violence in Austria based on culture. Harmful traditional practices are prohibited in Austria.

The state protects civil liberties by penalising those who disregard these rights. But even the state itself may only interfere with people's freedom on a few highly specific grounds. The state contributes to social coexistence in security and peace through this balance between individual freedom and protection of the community.



Constitutional principle of liberalism:

The right to freedom and all other fundamental rights can be found in our Federal Constitution. The human rights enshrined in our constitution, the European Convention on Human Rights and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union also guarantee the personal freedoms of every individual.

Values.

- **Self-determination:** I am allowed to make my own decisions about my life and am therefore also responsible for my own life.
- **Responsibility:** In responsibility towards my fellow human beings.
- **Self-discipline:** I respect orderly social coexistence.

Second principle: Rule of law.

The same rules apply to me as to everyone else. So it is not difficult for me to recognise the achievements of others.

You are watching an exciting competition between swimmers. The athletes are neck and neck. But the best part comes at the end, when they express their mutual appreciation – regardless of who emerges as the winner. All participants fought according to the same rules and can therefore recognise the achievements of others.

In sport, in everyday life, at work and in the family, we all observe certain behaviours that are necessary for social coexistence. Putting this fair play into practice is a prerequisite for justice.



*Fair play is
a prerequisite for justice.*



Respecting the equality of people in all their diversity forms the foundation for justice.

All people are equal before the law.

Austria is a constitutional state – the state and all people in this country must abide by the law. Personal attitudes are no justification for failing to obey Austrian law. This is because the law is applied equally to all people and people's rights are protected equally. Everyone is judged fairly, i. e. according to the same rules, taking into account the specific living situations in which they find themselves.

Equal rights for women and men are a particular expression of the rule of law. They are defined by law. Enshrining these in the law makes a significant contribution towards a fairer society. It provides protection from unjustified discrimination and helps break down prejudices. In Austria, everyone is expected to accept equal rights for women and men and to promote respectful coexistence through their own behaviour.

Each and every individual must respect and recognise the unique nature of their fellow human beings for the good of the community. Making this a reality on a small scale, in our personal environment, means enabling justice on a large scale.



**Constitutional principle
of the rule of law:**

The law and the equality of all people before it provide the basis and the limits for all state action.

Values.

- **Justice:** The same rules apply to me as to others.
- **Recognition:** I recognise the rights of my fellow human beings.
- **Respect:** I respect these rights by organising my actions accordingly.



Third principle: Democracy.

I get involved and have my say instead of just looking on and passing judgement.

Many different voices are needed for a well-rounded orchestral ensemble. The aim of a band is to make the individual instruments sound harmonious together.

That's hard work! Since everyone brings their own ideas to the table, people need to reach agreements again and again, which often results in entirely new approaches emerging. Our example shows that it is up to us to decide the arrangements that we make and the form for these. We want and should be able to shape our everyday lives, our social coexistence and our role in our environment ourselves.

Yet, being involved in shaping things is not only a rewarding experience for ourselves – every contribution is also valuable to our fellow human beings and the community. Just as in a band, many other areas of daily life are enriched by participation and getting involved. We promote cohesion in Austrian society by getting involved in our community, promoting common concerns and implementing new ideas.

It is up to us to decide the arrangements that we make and the form for these.

Because: taking part is better than looking on.

The law derives its authority from the people.

Austria is a democratic country. This means that you have a say. As citizens for instance, you can cast your vote in elections and participate in the creation of laws through elected representatives. You can get involved in interest groups and associations or take part in citizens' initiatives.

This is because co-determination and participation are not just about casting your vote in elections. Democracy is much more than that. It's the active participation in helping to shape all areas of life that affect or interest you! Your self-determination becomes co-determination in democracy. You have the opportunity to contribute your ideas.

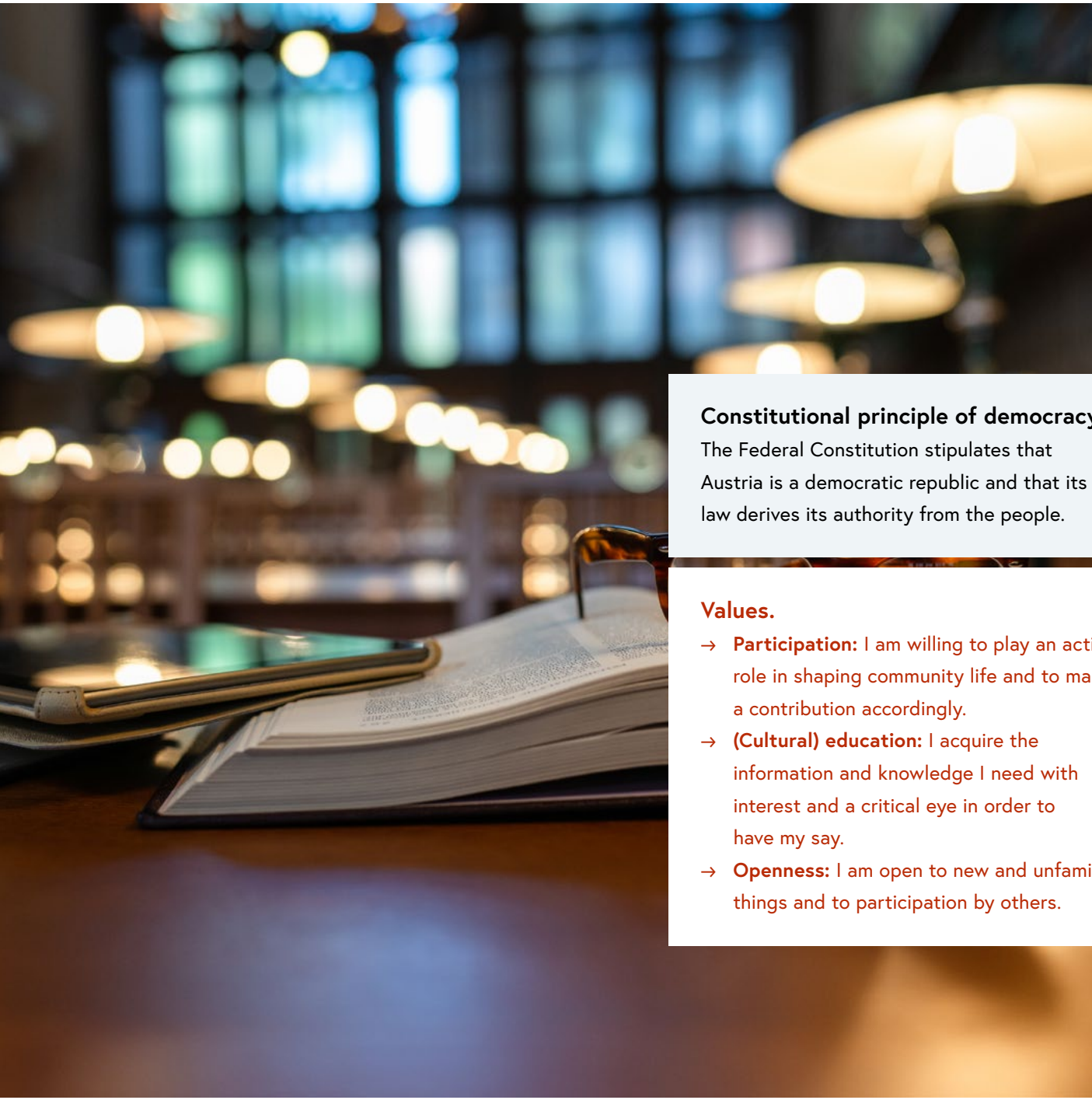
The equality of women and men under the law enables all citizens to participate actively and with self-determination in social, economic and political life and to realise their own potential. It is an essential characteristic of a democracy. There is no room for patriarchal patterns of thought and behaviour that place a higher value on men than on women in Austria.

Democracy is based on participation and thrives on having your say, taking part, helping to shape things, getting involved in decisions and sharing responsibility. This also creates a sense of belonging, which is a prerequisite for Austria becoming a new home.

People need to have a basic understanding of the living environment in order for them to get involved at different levels. This can also be described as (cultural) education. Education in this sense does not mean having a specific diploma, but rather being open, critical and curious about backgrounds and contexts.

People need to form a well-considered, open and unbiased opinion before they can actually point out problems and put forward solutions. Learning to understand something better with an open attitude means making democracy possible.





Constitutional principle of democracy:

The Federal Constitution stipulates that Austria is a democratic republic and that its law derives its authority from the people.

Values.

- **Participation:** I am willing to play an active role in shaping community life and to make a contribution accordingly.
- **(Cultural) education:** I acquire the information and knowledge I need with interest and a critical eye in order to have my say.
- **Openness:** I am open to new and unfamiliar things and to participation by others.





Fourth principle: Republic.

Also ask what you can do for others.

It all starts with normal rainfall, but just like the flood of the century in 2002, a few days later the rivers burst their banks and your house is also under water. A state of emergency is declared and the fire brigade, the army, neighbours and volunteers work together with you tirelessly to prevent even worse flooding. Emergency situations like these show how important it is to be willing to provide help.

Solidarity and cooperation are not only necessary in crises, but also in everyday life. Solidarity requires commitment. The willingness to stand up for others and help each other is important for social peace and societal cohesion. Voluntary work plays a crucial role in this. It is a fundamental part of social coexistence in our republic and strengthens our sense of belonging to Austria.

Solidarity requires commitment.

Fourth principle: Republic.

Those who promote the good of the community ultimately also promote their own good.

Social coexistence requires cohesion.

The state contributes to the common good in many ways, for example by ensuring security and peace. Security encompasses several aspects: on the one hand, the state ensures the maintenance of order and legislation and protects citizens from crime and violence. This includes the work of the police and judiciary in combating crime and bringing criminals to justice. On the other hand, security also includes protection against external threats, such as military defence and counter-terrorism measures.

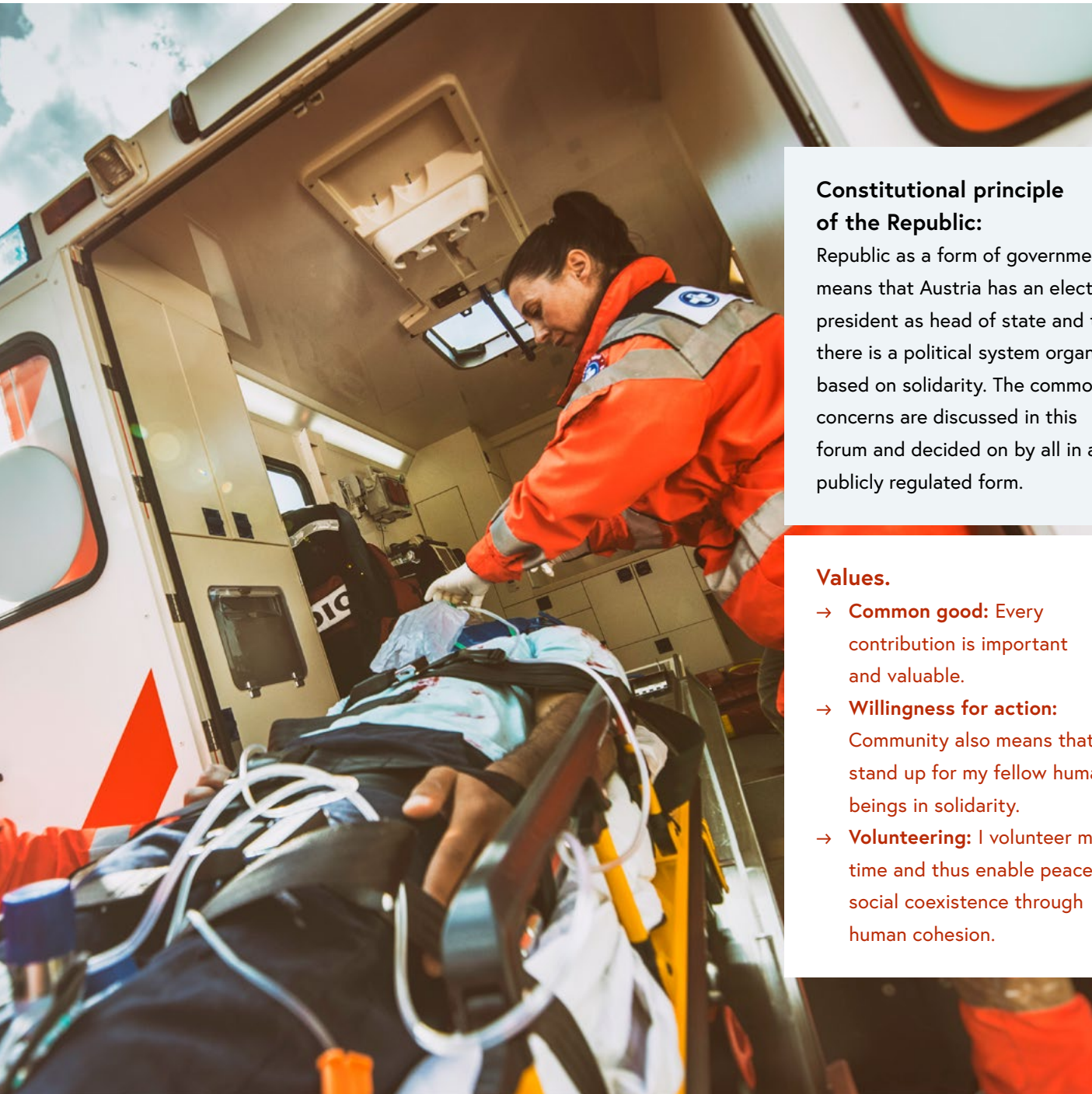
The state also ensures equal opportunities and social security. Legal regulations pursue the common good as their goal and are for the benefit of all citizens, even though they may be seen as a burden at first glance. This way, the public sector makes a crucial contribution

towards the education and healthcare systems. You also contribute towards these through your taxes. This is also a form of solidarity. A republic is characterised by cohesion and cooperation from the grassroots level right up to the highest state authorities.

Everyone should make a contribution towards this. You are responsible for yourself in general, but if you cannot cope with an emergency or crisis situation on your own, the community will offer you support. This also creates a sense of belonging and solidarity, which helps people feel responsible for this country, their city or municipality.

If you stand up for others and are willing to act in solidarity, then you are also contributing towards the common good in Austria every day. This has a long tradition in Austria by the way. It gave rise to an individual willingness to perform, which was a prerequisite for Austria's economic reconstruction after the Second World War.





Constitutional principle of the Republic:

Republic as a form of government means that Austria has an elected president as head of state and that there is a political system organised based on solidarity. The common concerns are discussed in this forum and decided on by all in a publicly regulated form.

Values.

- **Common good:** Every contribution is important and valuable.
- **Willingness for action:** Community also means that I stand up for my fellow human beings in solidarity.
- **Volunteering:** I volunteer my time and thus enable peaceful social coexistence through human cohesion.

Fifth principle: Federalism.

Anything that I can do myself, I should also do to the best of my ability.

Everyone in the family has different skills, tasks and responsibilities. Our example shows how everyone can contribute towards a functioning everyday life. Many situations are difficult to deal with alone. For instance, children care for their mother when she grows old. When they reach their limits, they seek professional help.

Sharing tasks and getting support are important. This applies not only to responsibility towards the family, but also to the most diverse areas of life.

I call on help when I no longer have enough strength myself.





Everyone has certain areas of responsibility that they can fulfil most effectively themselves.

Everyone is needed – the best solutions are often found locally.

Austria is a federal state consisting of nine federal provinces and over 2,000 municipalities. These municipalities, federal provinces and the Federation, i. e. Austria as a whole, work together and also under their own responsibility. The Federation and the federal provinces are responsible for legislation; the Federation, federal provinces and municipalities share administrative responsibilities. Each entity has certain areas of responsibility that it can fulfil most effectively itself. The division of state tasks among different entities is known as federalism. The special characteristics and capabilities of the municipalities, state governments and the Federation are taken into account in this process. For instance, the municipality determines where building is permitted, as it knows best where living space is needed.

Austria's federal structure allows for regional interests and needs to be accommodated more effectively. For citizens, this also means proximity and co-determination, which is a foundation for belonging. Local customs and traditions are another basis for togetherness. These include religious celebrations such as St Nicholas Day (Nikolaus), Christmas or Easter and non-religious festivals such as village and town festivals. The numerous Austrian dialects such as Tyrolean, Styrian and Viennese also indicate a special connection to a particular region and often have the effect of forming a strong sense of identity.

Austria has grown over time with its regional characteristics. Many different influences form the basis for development, security and prosperity. Federalism thrives on the fact that all entities in the state endeavour to fulfil their tasks in the best possible way, including you as the smallest individual unit. Only when the smallest entity cannot solve a task on its own does the larger entity take over. This form of task distribution is called subsidiarity. It also applies to Austria's relationship with the European Union.





Constitutional principle of federalism:

Federalism means a functioning distribution of tasks and enables the greatest possible diversity in a unifying entity.

Values.

- **Diversity:** Everyone lives their own life in different traditions and cultures.
- **Personal responsibility:** Everyone should be able to look after themselves within their own means.
- **Achievement:** I am willing to actively contribute towards the common good to the best of my ability.

Sixth principle: Separation of powers.

When I see a person in need, I pluck up the courage and do something.

You hear noise and arguments in a neighbouring flat, there is a conflict in the family. What options do you have to provide the right help? You can intervene yourself, ask others for help or call the police. No matter what you decide – it takes courage not to avoid conflicts out of fear, but to intervene yourself.

It takes moral courage to call the police. Security means respecting the dignity of others and protecting them from others.

Security is guaranteed by the state. The state has a monopoly on the use of force, so the power of the state is subject to control. This is a basic prerequisite for ensuring that power is not exercised arbitrarily. In this sense, the police act as a service provider for your safety. That wasn't always the case. During the National Socialist era for instance, state power was exercised arbitrarily. Austria is actively coming to terms with its National Socialist past

and the responsibility that goes with this. Comprehensive measures are being implemented for instance at state and civil society level to ensure that anti-Semitism can no longer gain a foothold in Austria in any form. These include educational programmes that raise awareness of the history of the Holocaust and the dangers of anti-Semitism. There are also initiatives in place to support Jewish communities and promote intercultural dialogue. Austria is creating a legal framework to prosecute and punish anti-Semitic offences consistently. National and international co-operation and commemorative events are further important components in the efforts to combat anti-Semitic ideologies.



*It takes a willingness to stand up
for yourself and others.*



Sixth principle: Separation of powers.

A society in which people's rights are respected is a safe and secure society.

Power in the state is divided.

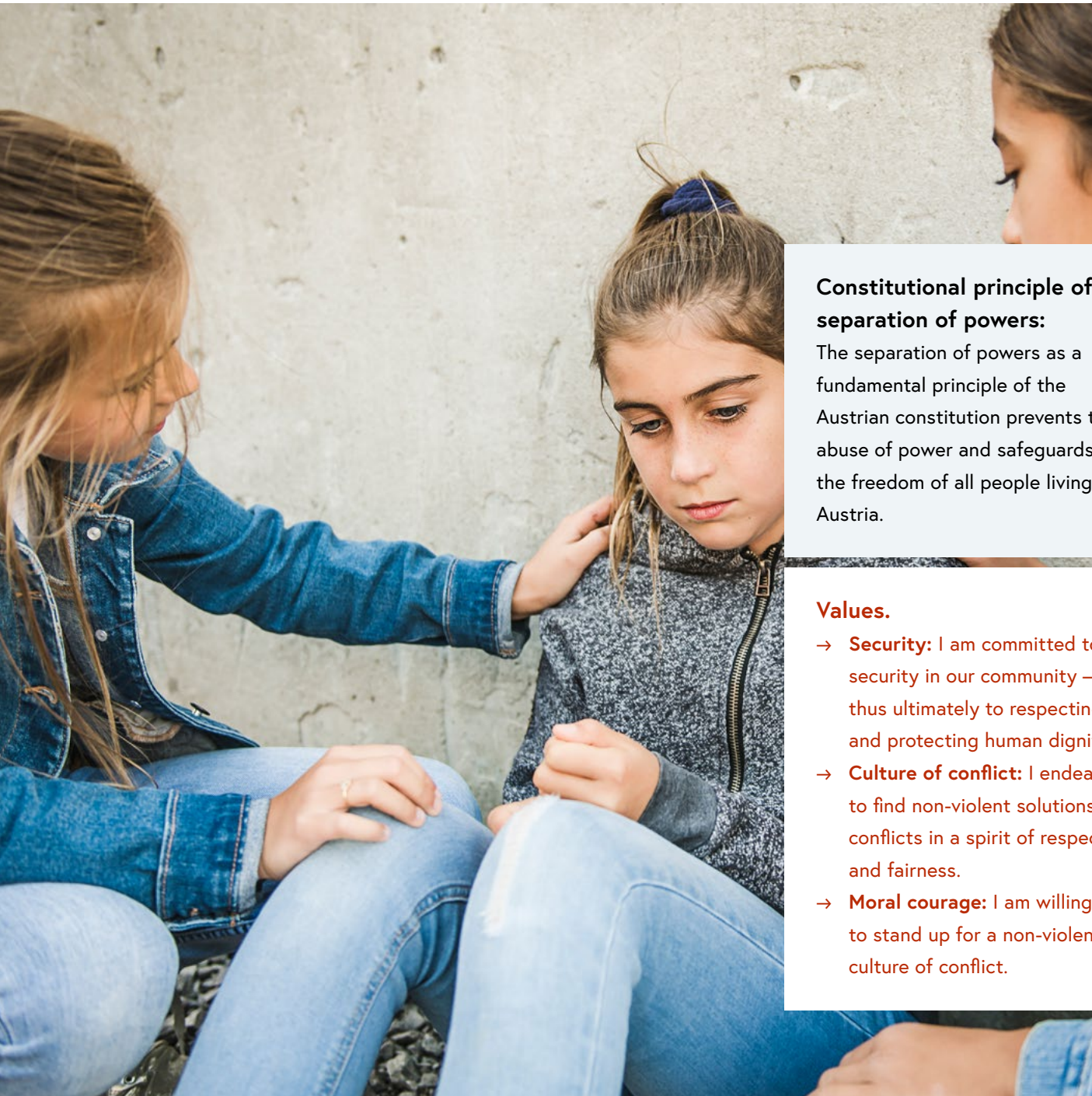
The three branches of government in Austria are parliament (legislation), administration (executive branch) and jurisdiction (judiciary) and these act as a check on each other. This prevents arbitrary decisions and safeguards human dignity, freedom and equality of all before the law.

The police have the task of ensuring public safety and security in the country. The police intervene in emergency and dangerous situations, protect people and property and ensure that laws and regulations are complied with. The police also engage in preventive work by raising public awareness of security issues through information campaigns and co-operation with other institutions, thus contributing towards general crime prevention.

But the separation of powers and the police are not enough to guarantee security – you also need people who stand up for this. A culture of conflict is needed – you must be willing to deal with conflicts in a non-violent manner to stand up for your own rights and the rights of your fellow citizens, even if you fear disadvantages as a result. A constructive culture of conflict promotes respectful cooperation. This also includes practising moral courage. The willingness to stand up for yourself and others has more than just a short-term effect. Civil courage contributes to social stability by preventing injustice and violence from being tolerated. The joint commitment of citizens creates trust and cohesion.

People who have the courage not to tolerate anti-Semitic statements and actions and take a public stand against these send an important signal that there is no room for anti-Semitism in Austria. The fight against anti-Semitism is therefore not only a high priority for the state, but also for civil society.





Constitutional principle of separation of powers:

The separation of powers as a fundamental principle of the Austrian constitution prevents the abuse of power and safeguards the freedom of all people living in Austria.

Values.

- **Security:** I am committed to security in our community – and thus ultimately to respecting and protecting human dignity.
- **Culture of conflict:** I endeavour to find non-violent solutions to conflicts in a spirit of respect and fairness.
- **Moral courage:** I am willing to stand up for a non-violent culture of conflict.

The basis of Austrian legal culture is human dignity.

Development process

This is a product of the legal/cultural values of the Austrian constitution. The relevance of these concepts was discussed in a special expert conference, with the Advisory Committee on Integration, the independent Expert Council for Integration and with interested citizens from various parts of society. Those comments, additions and results have been incorporated into this brochure. We would like to thank everyone involved for their kind support, co-operation and interest.

Freedom

Self-determination

Responsibility

Self-discipline

Rule of law

Justice

Recognition

Respect

Human dignity

Democracy

Participation
(Cultural) education
Openness

Republic

Common good
Willingness for
action
Volunteering

Federalism

Diversity
Personal
responsibility
Achievment

Separation of powers

Security
Culture of conflict
Moral courage

