

How many Protestants in Austria in the future?

Austria finds itself in a period of religious transition where the long time dominant Catholic Church faces serious decline in membership while other groups, particularly the seculars and the Muslims increase their influence. Similarly, the share of the Protestant Church in the total population has been decreasing in the last few decades, from 6 percent in 1971 to 4.7 percent in 2001. The decline was observed through all age groups but particularly among the young generation: whereas 5.2 percent of the 20-29 age-group were Protestant in 1981, they were only 4.1 percent in 2001. In the study by Goujon et al. (2007), the future religious composition in Austria is projected using a set of scenarios that take into account religion and age-specific fertility and migration rates as well as secularization rates of the Catholic and Protestant groups. The share of Protestants in the total population is estimated to reach a level between 3.4 percent and 5.2 percent in 2051 depending on the scenarios (see figure 1). However and contrary to what is happening for the Roman-Catholic church, the Protestant church may witness a rise of its membership—and this in eleven scenarios— mostly due to the benefit of a higher share of Protestants in the migrants (above 8%) than in the population living in Austria. Fliegenschnee et al. (2004) who also projected the future size of the Protestant population in Austria also foresaw a substantial decrease, partly because of secularization and partly because of the conversion of children of mixed couples (where one partner is non-protestant which occurs in more than 80 percent of all marriages with at least one Protestant partner). Also the Protestant group is affected by its fertility patterns since Protestant women have the lowest fertility of all religious group estimated at 1.2 children in 2001, below that of Roman Catholics and other denominations. The analysis also reveals substantial differences especially between the capital Vienna and other regions in the rate of secularization from the Protestant group, where secularization trends in Vienna are much stronger. Preliminary projections (Goujon 2009) show that the share of Protestants in Vienna could be as low as 3 percent in 2051 in a business as usual scenario (see figure 2).

References:

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