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## **Austria: Parra (Caritas), “loneliness is a silent crisis that affects us all”. Humanitarian organisations and psychologists ask for a national Action Plan**

Humanitarian organisations, along with the professional association of psychologists, have drawn attention to the dangers of loneliness and isolation, and asked for a national Action Plan. Ten measures, presented in Vienna on Wednesday, aim to fight the problem, which, according to Caritas’s recent survey, approximately 600,000 people in Austria are struggling with for over a half of their time. The goal is to reduce the psychosocial and social consequences of loneliness, according to humanitarian organisations such as Caritas, Diakonie, Poverty Conference, Red Cross, pro Mente, cancer support and patients’ organisations. The secretary general of Caritas, Anna Parr, described loneliness as “a silent crisis that affects us all”. Ministries too, as well as the business world and civil society, should take part in the required national Action Plan, which should be built on “well-grounded data” and a “real political willingness”. Only in this way can social bonds be strengthened. One of the demands is that the greatest priority of such ten measures should be ending the stigmatisation of loneliness. According to humanitarian organisations, a national Action Plan should be worked out, and a coordination office against loneliness should be established. In addition, the financial cost of loneliness should be quantified, and research should be funded. Further demands include the extension of free psychological support, the right to multilingual, barrier-free measures to fight loneliness, the promotion of a “culture of a new way of being together”, and special care for the more vulnerable groups. Social participation should be promoted too, including the “right to analogue measures”. Martin Schenk of the Poverty Conference warned that loneliness will become even more threatening in connection with poverty, social crises and poor social infrastructure. The feeling to be forgotten leads to a loss of confidence in society and democracy, which may also reduce voter turnouts.

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