

# AUSTRIAN YOUTH POLICY: ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Republic of Austria, land-locked country in Central Europe with an area (83 879 km<sup>2</sup>) slightly smaller than the state of Maine (USA). With GDP of US\$ 47 693 per capita in 2014 it is one of the richest countries in the world (<https://data.oecd.org/austria.htm>). Austria also ranks above the OECD average in jobs and earnings, subjective well-being, personal security, civic engagement, health status, environmental quality but below average in work-life balance (OECD, 2015). Figure 1 shows the distribution of the national budget in the year 2012.

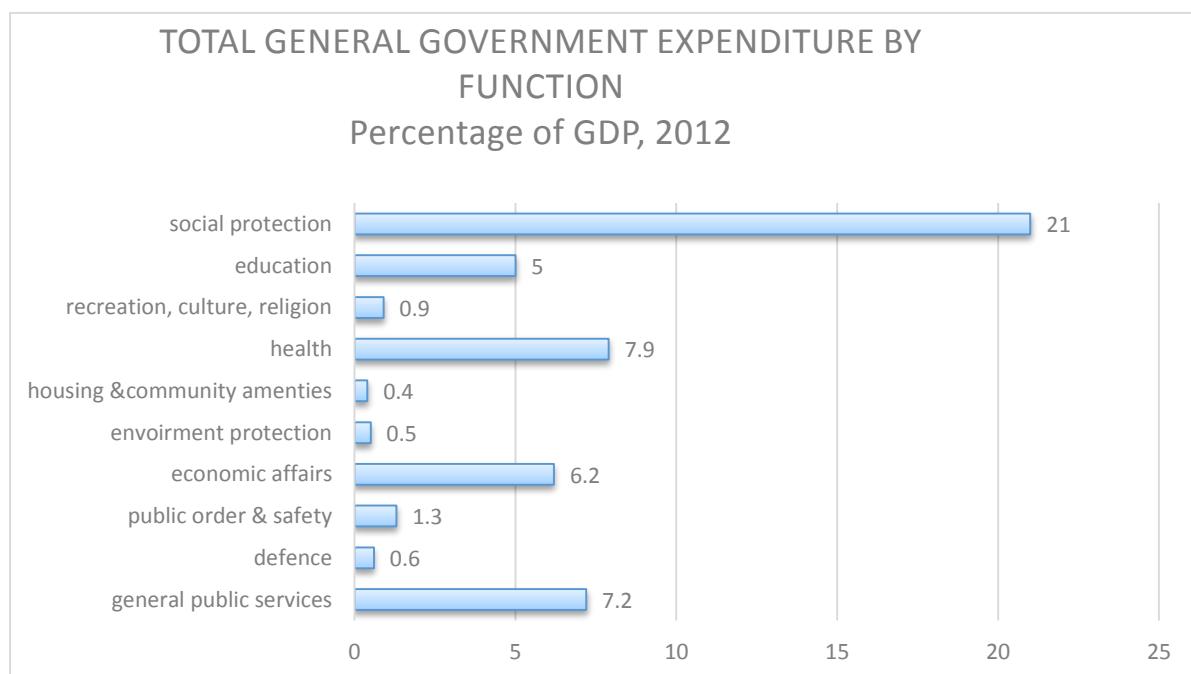


Figure 1: Total General Government expenditure by function, Percentage of GDP, 2012; OECD (2015), National accounts at a glance

Two categories considering youth (social security and education) are the categories in which Austria financially invests the most. More concretely, according to the federal budget of Austria, the government spent EUR 9.2 million (USD 12,6 million) in 2013 specifically on youth policy measures. As a result of this investments, Austria has one of the lowest rate of youth unemployment, NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training) and school-drop-outs. The Dual (Apprenticeship) System is seen as the key of this success with even some of the EU countries considering to adopt it.

On the other side, some authors emphasize that this success story fails to mention inequalities concerning migrant background and segregation of the educational system which (re)produces social inequalities regarding successful (school-work) transitions (Knecht, Kuchler, Atzmüller, 2014). In the national level, there is a considerable gap between the richest and poorest. The top 20% of the population earn about four times as much as the bottom 20% (OECD, 2015). This gap highly reflects on the educational chances and further continues in growth.

In this paper, some aspects of Austrian youth policy will be presented with a main focus on employment and education. After a short historical overview and an insight on Youth Strategy, biggest strengths of Austrian youth policy but also its weaknesses will be described. Finally, this paper will deliver a brief look at problems encountered by care leavers, a group which needs to cope with many challenges and is rarely mentioned in world reports.

## 2. BASIC FRAME

### 2.1. DEFINITION OF YOUTH

In Austria, there are various definitions of youth in use (BMWFJ, 2012): Austrian Youth Strategy targets 14-24 year olds (BMWFJ, 2013), while the Federal Youth Representation Act and the Federal Youth Promotion Act defined them as people up to the age of 30.

Austrian General Civil Code distinguishes four age groups:

- child: from birth to the 7th birthday
- underage minor: age of 7-14 years
- mature minor: age of 14-18 years
- at the age of 18 they attain full age

Therefore, all underage children and adolescents, families and family lifestyles (pregnancies and parents) in Austria belong to the youth welfare.

## 2.2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

According to the typologies and the wording of the IARD study (the IARD network - Task Force for European Youth Research) on the situation of youth and youth policy in Europe, Austria was characterised by a static definition of youth policy. In this context, 'static' means that the principles and structures of youth policy hardly changed over time. The youth policy model in Austria could be perceived as a protective model.

In the first instance, youth was considered vulnerable and a group in society which needed to be protected, promoted and supported (Hahn, 2007).

Before mid-19th century, the role of protector was carried out by Catholic Church. For the young people who were in need, Church provided places to sleep and a community to take care of them. After 1884, association of young workers (predecessor organisation to the socialist youth) cared about the education, workers' rights and

offered social community. In 1919, the state also became actively involved and passed a law which aimed at improving working condition. This so-called night-shift law states that juveniles between the ages of 14 and 18, as well as women, are not allowed to work at night. With a law from 1936 youth education came entirely under the state control. After the Second World War, the state implemented reforms concerning youth welfare, while the democracy and freedom became the main focus of (re)established youth organisations. When talking about 'static' label for Austria, it is important to mention that the first enactment of national laws on youth promotion and youth representation was in the year 2000 (until then only youth welfare was dealt within a national law, although youth and juveniles were mentioned in other laws). In these two laws, the ways in which youth organisations are supported and how they should be included in youth policy making are stipulated (Zentner, 2012) starting a more active national youth policy. Without giving up its protective approach, the government realized that it must strengthen the young people, empower them to recognize and to pursue their own way, and also to provide the structures to make a positive development towards adulthood a viable option.

In 2001, an Act of Parliament created a Federal Youth Representation Body [Bundes-Jugendvertretung (B-JV)], which - in all matters affecting Austrian youth - enjoys the same rights as the statutory representation bodies of employees, employers, farmers and senior citizens in Austria. In 2007 reduction of the voting age to 16 years is a clear commitment to an active, critical youth, assuming responsibility and taking decisions. Network agency for Open Youth Work (the bOJA) was established in 2008. It provided the opportunity for Open Youth Work to exchange best practices, but also to get involved in policy making in a structured way.

National politics is determined to confront the European challenges and to prepare the young people for the life in Europe. It also aims to empower youth to design the future of Europe. (Hahn, 2007)

### 2.3. YOUTH STRATEGY

Republic of Austria is a federal state consisting of 9 independent provinces. Owing to its federalism, policy responsibilities are divided between federal government and provinces. Each of the nine provinces of the Austrian federation has its own youth department, which coordinates youth work in the province, offering services and organising activities for young people.

A recent study proved that only three federal laws are officially “youth laws”, but over 60 laws on the federal level target young people directly. These youth laws are on youth promotion, on youth participation and on youth welfare. (Zentner, 2011)

Agendas of general matter and youth policy coordination lie within the Federal Ministry of Families and Youth (BMFJ). Aiming to ‘strengthen and develop youth policy’ throughout the country, BMFJ launched the Youth Strategy in 2013. The goals of the strategy are to establish youth policy as a cross-sectional issue, to position youth work as an important pillar, to make the existing activities for youth in all political areas or fields of action visible, and consequently to improve the coordination of measures between the youth-related stakeholders.

The substantive tasks and organisation of the Youth Strategy are based on eight fields of action that are oriented towards the EU Youth Strategy from 2010-2018. Fields of action are namely: education and training, employment and entrepreneurship, voluntary work, health and well-being, youth in the world, creativity and culture, social

inclusion, and participation. Based on this fields of action three strategic framework objectives were formulated: 1. Employment and learning; 2. Participation and initiative; 3. Quality of Life and a Spirit of Cooperation along with recommendations for concrete measures.

Among these strategic framework objectives, the most relevant for this paper is the strategic objective of Employment and learning. The strategic goals in this regard are: In 2020 Austria will continue to be among the top three countries in the EU in youth employment (15 to 24 year-olds); In 2020 Austria will have the lowest rate of early school leavers in the EU; Austria will produce more company founders less than 30 years of age (Austrian Youth Strategy, 2013). The latter will not be discussed further on in this document.

### 3. EDUCATION-WORK – AUSTRIA AS A EUROPEAN MODEL OF GOOD PRACTICE FOR SOLVING THE PROBLEM OF YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT – AND THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN

Since the economic and financial crisis of 2008, one of the biggest challenges facing European society is the dramatically high level of youth unemployment. Nevertheless, there are big differences between the EU Member States. With Greece or Spain having currently every second youngster without a job, in Germany and Austria youth unemployment is around 10%, the lowest in Europe (Die Sozial Partner Oesterreich 2014).

What is the reason of such a difference? What is the key of good results and practice in Austria? Has this Model of good practice any weaknesses?

Youth unemployment not only depends on the macroeconomic situation of a country, it is furthermore influenced by structural factors of the labour market as well as by the

quality of the educational and training system. Young people have been in the focus of the labour market and education policy in Austria for several years. Many measures were established to facilitate the pathway from education to working life, to reduce drop-outs and to ameliorate the system. And not without the results: the comparably strong performance is evident not only in employment and unemployment indicators, but also in low NEET (not in employment, education or a training) rates and low rates of early school-leavers.

To a large extent, the Austrian success story is based on the Dual (apprenticeship) system.

### 3.1. AUSTRIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Austrian educational system has many sections on every level and it takes some effort to understand it. Compulsory education in Austria starts at the age of 6 and lasts for nine years. The primary level (*Volkschule*) lasts four years. Lower secondary education encompasses the first 4 years after primary education. Pupils can choose between the following types of schools (different admission requirements): General Secondary School (*Hauptschule*), New Secondary School (*Neue Mittelschule*), Academic Secondary School Lower Level (*AHS Unterstufe*) as well as special needs schools and inclusive education. For the majority of Austrian schoolchildren the first school year at upper secondary level is the final year of compulsory schooling at the same time. Then they can decide between a vocational (VET) and a general education pathway. VET programmes are provided within the framework of apprenticeship training (dual system), VET schools (BMSs) and VET colleges (BHSs). General education is imparted at the upper cycle of AHS. In 2013, according to Eurostat, 70,2% of school children opt for a VET programme after completing lower secondary level

(EU average for the same year was 48,9%). After having completed secondary level of education one can study on post-secondary or tertiary level. Students who have finished VET schools or Dual system do not have direct access to tertiary education. Path to university studies for these students is through supplementary exams in German, English, math, and the respective specialist area.  
[\(http://www.bildungssystem.at\)](http://www.bildungssystem.at)

### 3.1.1. THE DUAL (APPRENTICESHIP) SYSTEM

After completing ninth year of compulsory schooling (at the age of 15), initial vocational qualifications can be obtained by attending a dual program (apprenticeship and part-time vocational school) or in full-time VET schools. Approximately 40% of students enter the apprenticeship system and other 30% opt for a VET school or VET college (WKO, 2015).

The Dual System (apprenticeship system) includes on-the-job training and classroom education. This system is primarily aimed at individuals who want to take up work at the age of 15, but is accessible up to the age of 18. Apprentices may choose from more than 200 apprenticed trades in crafts, industry and services sectors. Depending on the apprenticeship, training lasts between two and four years (mostly three years). The apprentice spends 80% of his or her working time in a company and 20% in a vocational school.

According to Ryan (2000) there are three advantages of Dual apprenticeship system:

- 1) It contributes to positive economic development by providing demanded qualifications

2) The combination of theoretical learning in the vocational school and practical activities in firms can be more attractive than a purely school-based system, resulting in reduced dropout rates.

3) A positive employment influence deriving from the apprenticeship is assumed (Wolbers, 2007; Shavit and Müller, 2000; O'Higgins, 2012; Breen, 2005)

Integration of young people into the labour market, considering European economy trends, becomes challenging. To face these challenges, Austrian government established in 2008 a training guarantee. Since then, each unemployed person under the age of 18 who wants to complete an apprenticeship but is not accepted at the market, can complete a supra-company apprenticeship instead (Schmidt & Edthofe, 2015). These supra-company apprenticeships are publicly financed and cost around 15.600 € per person/year (Dornmayr & Nowak, 2014). The education is carried out by the institutional training providers and educational workshops or companies. During the time at the supra-company training entity spent by a young person, the public employment service continues to support him/her to eventually place him/her in a company-based apprenticeship. Nevertheless, training can also be completed at the training entity and the final exam corresponds to that in a company-based apprenticeship (The Austrian Apprenticeship System, Background paper 2013). Due to its success, which manifests itself in Austria's low youth unemployment rate, it served as role model for the EU Youth Guarantee.

In addition to measure of supra-company training, Government measures for young people can be categorized into three main parts (BMASK, 2012):

- Measures to increase the supply of apprenticeship opportunities (subsidies for every final examination with excellent/good grade, support of further education of trainers, measures for apprentices with learning deficits)

- Measures to prepare young people for vocational training (eg. specialised vocational information centres; Youth Coaching; Ready for learning and training...)
- Particular qualification and employment programmes for unemployed individuals aged 19 to 24. (eg. Future for youth)

A major criterion for success is that the social partners have a strong formative influence on the content and scope of the training: trade profiles are negotiated between the social partners and form the basis for the part time vocational schools' curricula (Youth Employment and Vocational Education and Training in Austria, 2014).

#### EXAMPLE OF A GOOD PRACTICE WITHIN PROJECTS VOCATIONAL ORIENTATION

##### PROJECT: „BERUFSFINDUNGSBEGLEITUNG“ (Career Choice Tutoring, Styria)

The Project Berufsfindungsbegleitung (BFB) in the province Styria is considered a best practice in providing vocational orientation for young people. It had existed as a pilot already since 1999 and covers whole Styria (apart from Graz) since 2010. It assists young people in their education and career choice, helps young apprenticeship seekers and their parents in choosing the appropriate profession and supports young people also at the beginning of their apprenticeship. It cooperates with companies, schools and other partners and has a wide range of offers from individual counselling to larger events and workshops.

#### 3.1.1.1. CHALENGES OF DUAL APPRENTICESHIPS SYSTEM

At the first sight the “dual apprenticeships system” seems to be an easy way to enter the working life. For this reason, other countries in Europe consider its adoption.

However, different authors stress some problems related to this kind of vocational education in Austria.

The quality of the training in some companies is very low and the youngsters have difficulties to pass the final apprenticeship examination. About 18% of the apprentices do not pass the final examination at the end of the apprenticeship (Dornmayr and Nowak, 2014).

The number of plants actually employing apprentices has fallen substantially over the last few years. The number was more or less constant throughout the mid-1990s at around 40,000, but this fell to 33,600 between 2009 and 2013 (Dornmayr and Nowak 2014).

The probability of a young worker staying with the company after an apprenticeship has fallen to a relatively low level. Two years after completion of their training, fewer than 40% of former apprentices are still employed with the same company, and fewer than 60% are employed within same industry (Dornmayr and Nowak 2014).

Knecht, Kuchler, Atzmüller (2014) are stressing the danger of making occupational life decision at the age of 15. A ‘juvenile moratorium’, or stage of orientation, is not foreseen. The early entrance in the work life goes along with an ‘institutionalisation of problems’ and the creation of ‘problematic youngsters’.

The Vocational educational training system is also selective insofar as youth of migrant background have more difficulties in securing an apprenticeship. Insufficient German language skills, low (recognized) skills level and lack of information on possible training and occupations make it difficult for young migrants to get a foothold in the labour market. Out of the average number of registered apprenticeship-seekers (10,400) more than one third had a migrant background (SocIEtY, 2014).

The evaluation of dual system trainees is seen as limiting their ability to attain tertiary education afterwards (IMF, 2014).

IMF analysis shows that access to vocational training is not relevant for adult unemployment. A higher share of individuals with low education generally has a strong and negative association with the adult unemployment and employment rates.

### 3.2. NEETs AND EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS

Looking closer at the unemployed youth in the age group of 15 to 24 years, one can observe that 20- to 24-year olds are more often confronted with unemployment than the 15- to 19-year-olds (Table 1). This may be justified with the fact that, in general, the formal education has already been completed in this age group, usually ending with the age of 19 or 20. (ABEONA, 2016)

AGE GROUP	NUMBER
Age up to 19	8.228
Age 19 – 24	34.516
<b>Total</b>	<b>42.744</b>

Table 1: Austrian youth unemployment data by age (Österreichisches Institut für Berufsbildungsforschung, 2014)

Despite higher numbers, the situation with the age group from 20 to 24 is also better in Austria compared to other European countries. With the average youth unemployment rate in EU being 20,4%, Austria's youth unemployment rate of a 10,8% is still one of the lowest (Eurostat, 2015).

When considering unemployment of an age group 18-24, European Commission (EC) puts special focus on early school leavers and NEETs.

**Early school leaving** is linked to unemployment, social exclusion, and poverty. Young people who leave education and training prematurely are bound to lack skills and qualifications, and to face serious, persistent problems on the labour market. Education and Training Monitor 2015 showed that about 60% of early school leavers are subsequently either inactive or unemployed.

EU countries reacted on this issue by defining a clear goal: "By 2020, the share of early leavers from education and training (aged 18-24) should be less than 10%" (EUROPE 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, 2010). One of three strategic goals of Austrian Youth Strategy in the field of Employment and Learning is: "In 2020 Austria will have the lowest rate of early school leavers in the EU" (Austrian Youth Strategy, 2013)

According to Eurostat in the year 2014, 7.0% of Austrian residents aged 18-24 were early school leavers, compared to 11.1% in the EU28, clearly showing that Austria has achieved European goal. To further decrease the early school leaving, the national strategy tries to raise awareness among school authorities and responsible stakeholders to combat the early school leaving in a more coordinated way. There are also initiatives to tackle absenteeism by a new law, which regulates the cooperation of professionals of different support systems like counseling teachers, school psychologists, social workers, youth coaches and representatives from school boards (<https://www.bmbf.gv.at/schulen/index.html>). Main focus of the National Strategy on Early School Leaving is on prevention and intervention rather than on compensation (Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan AUSTRIA, 2014). Measures to prevent early school leaving include support and information, offers the interface between the school and work (youth coaching), (re-)integration measures and employment programmes. With preventive offers against early school leaving on the one hand and diverse, low-

threshold programmes for young people who are not ready to begin an apprenticeship on the other, the intention is to lead more young people towards sound vocational training (National Social Report Austria, 2014)

#### EXAMPLE OF A GOOD PRACTICE WITHIN PROJECTS FOR EARLY SCHOOL DROPS:

##### “JU-CAN”

The clients of "ju-can" receive a subsistence allowance from the Public Employment Service (PES). "Ju-can", managed by the Catholic Church, is a 12 - month program for 16 to 20 - year-old jobless teenagers aimed at developing new perspectives and opening the door to a job or apprenticeship training. The participants are recruited through street-workers, youth centers, youth welfare offices, etc.

#### PRODUCTION SCHOOLS

In Production schools, young people can gain experience of the processes and requirements of the world of work, and can find out how working life functions. The goal of these production schools is to offer stability, increase motivation, and provide specialist knowledge and a basic qualification – all of which will ideally be put into practice via (re-) integration into the labour market, particularly in the form of taking up an apprenticeship.

**The NEET group** ('Not in Education, Employment or Training) includes not only the conventional unemployed job-seekers, but also those who are disengaged from both education and work and are therefore not looking for a job. Being economically inactive, nevertheless, does not always imply disengagement: NEETs also include those unavailable for work (e.g. young carers or those who are sick or disabled), the

'opportunity-seekers' (those who are waiting for better opportunities), and the 'voluntary NEETs' (those who choose to be inactive while travelling or engaging in activities such as arts or self-directed learning) (EU YOUTH REPORT 2015 – SOCIAL).

Young people who are in the NEET group are at risk of becoming socially excluded, with an income below the poverty-line and without the skills to improve their economic situation. The proportion of young people between 20 and 24 years old not in education, employment or training (NEET rate) in 2015 in Austria was also one of the lowest in the EU, at 9,6%, around half the EU average of 17%. (Eurostat, 2015)

The concern that there might be a lost generation, led the European Commission to launch the Youth Guarantee (YG) scheme in 2013 as a pledge by the member states to ensure that youths under the age of 25 (whether or not they are registered in the public employment services) receive either an offer for employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or training within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education. The YG aims to combine early intervention with activation policies, involving public authorities and all social partners, in order to improve school-to-work transition and the labour market outcomes of youths. Its target are the 7.5 million youth NEETs (*No Country for Young People? Youth Labour Market Problems in Europe, 2015*).

Austria spent 610 million Euros funding the Youth Guarantee. A wide range of institutions are involved in avoiding drop-outs from the education system, bringing young people back into education, or integrating them into the labour market and providing social and vocational support. On a national level, the key institutional actors are the ministries responsible for education, labour, social affairs, economy and youth,

The Public Employment Service (AMS), the Federal Social Office (BSB) as well as the social Partners figure prominently.

#### EXAMPLE OF A GOOD PRACTICE WITHIN NEET PROJECTS:

##### PROJECT “LOGIN”

The aim of this project is to prepare young people to enter the labour market via an offer of low threshold hourly work. The work offer is a self-determined, non-bureaucratic opportunity to earn money. Socio-pedagogical service is only provided when requested. Stabilisation, gaining self-esteem and a positive perception of work is the priority. The content of this project is a bicycle rental outlet, which comprises activities as repair and maintenance of bicycles, development of corporate design, rental logistics, advertisement, public relations and event management.

### 3.3. THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN

As shown in previous sections, Austria has one of the best results in the EU dealing with youth unemployment rate, early school leavers and NEETs. Nonetheless, there is also the other side of the coin and challenges to be tackled. European Commission (2015) stresses out the following:

- Foreign-born students have three times higher risk of social exclusion and poverty as native-born students
- Educational performance is very dependent on parents' socio-economic status
- Higher education lacks consistent strategic orientation, it is underfunded and has high drop-out rate

#### 3.3.1. YOUTH WITH A MIGRANT BACKGROUND

Austria has one of the largest population groups with immigrant origin among OECD countries. Migrants and ethnic minorities are among the groups most vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion. They usually face multiple disadvantages leading to persistent poverty and a marginalised position in society (OECD, 2015). As the 2012 EU Youth Report pointed out, immigrants often lack the social capital (networks and information) needed for being fully included in society. Immigrant children and those from poorer families are more likely to leave school early and have fewer chances to attain higher education qualifications (in 2014, 14.9% of foreign-born students in Austria left school early as compared to 5.7% of native-born students) (OECD, 2015). According to European Youth Report (2015) Austria is listed as one of the three EU countries where the risk of poverty or social exclusion for immigrant youth are especially large. Taking into account recent migrant crisis (latest figures from the Austria's Interior Ministry show that Austria had 200% increase of asylum applicants in 2015 compared to 2014) the problem is expected to deepen.

Knecht, Kuchler, Atzmüller (2015) point out how the students with migrant background often face disadvantages when trying to make a better future because of the difficulties with German language. In the beginning of education, a significant number is sent into “special educational needs school” (*Sonderschulen*) which are intended for students with special needs (such as physically or mentally handicapped children, weak students, or so-called “problem children”). Figures from Statistik Austria (2013) show that, in these special schools, there are twice as many students with another colloquial language compared to German-speaking students. The attendance in special educational needs schools is stigmatised and later leads to difficulties when looking for an apprenticeship position or a job, and then there is usually no way back into the regular school system.

Austria also ranks among the bottom six EU countries with regard to the impact of socioeconomic factors on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results of Austrian students. Schraad-Tischler (2015) stresses out how this poor rank highlights a missed opportunity to sufficiently integrate children and youth at the margins of Austrian society: those from immigrant and poorer households.

Since PISA, it has become increasingly evident that the Austrian education system is highly selective in a way that the school enforces social inequality between different family backgrounds. The success of youngsters in school in Austria remains to be highly dependent on parents' ability to contribute in their children's education. This is related to the fact that in the Austrian education system children get channelled into different school types at a very early stage (the age of 10), as described in previous chapters. This represents a fundamental predestination of the educational path of young people (choice of vocation, the opportunities available on the apprenticeship and job market, and the future level of income, access to higher education). The access to the Austrian university system has therefore become increasingly unequal in recent years, with children of parents holding tertiary education degrees and/or having higher incomes enjoying significantly better odds of successfully graduating from university (Knecht, Kuchler, Atzmüller, 2015). Only 21% of young adults in Austria have attained higher educational qualifications than their parents, one of the lowest rates of upward educational mobility across OECD countries (OECD, 2014). A citizens' initiative that called on parliament to correct this negative process of selection failed to produce significant reform. This state of affairs violates the concept of social justice, and at the same time fails to exploit the national population's talents to the fullest (Sustainable governance Indicators, 2015).

Although Government tries to solve mentioned problems with different Measurement packages (reform of early language support in nurseries, intensified remedial German lessons at school, other measures regarding legal and organisational aspects of the school system as well as general initiatives based on inclusion approaches) it hasn't yet been fruitful.

### 3.3. CARE LEAVERS – WHAT ABOUT US?

According to Kinder- und Jugendhilfebericht (Children and Youth Services Report) for 2014, there were 9442 minors (aged 0-18) in alternative (foster or residential) care in Austria, which makes 0.63% of total number of Austrians minors. Among those, 6159 were in the age between 14 and 18. Every year, around 2000 of them, because of the coming of age, need to leave the alternative care system. Until recent, young people needed to leave care rigorously with the age of 18. Nowadays, this age limit is more flexible and the local governments allow under specific circumstances moving out in the age between 18 and 21. This group is not mentioned in the big European Commission or OECD reports, and is also rarely mentioned in any general reports or statistics.

The reason that care leavers are mentioned in this paper has its roots in authors' long experience working with this group and desire to make more visible multiple challenges that care leavers face encountering independence. It is the fact that poverty and exclusion do not strike evenly, with those starting their life with fewer opportunities tend to accumulate disadvantages. Many researches have shown the high risk of social exclusion for young people leaving care. (Bilson et al. 2000; Kelleher et al. 2000; Stein et al. 2000; Courtney et al. 2001, 2005; Dixon & Stein 2005; Courtney et al. 2001; Stein 2006; Valle&Bravo, 2013)

Moving out of the parental household is found to be the 'strongest predictor behind youth poverty' (Aassve, 2007), which raises a question on the strength of the predictor of moving out of alternative care. Young people in Austria need to leave care between the age of 18 and 21, whereas most of their peers remain at home until late 20s. Care leavers are expected to undertake their journey to adulthood far younger and in far less time than their peers (Lister 1998; Stein 2005). According to Eurostat (2014) concerning the risk of poverty for young people, the differences between young people living with their parents or living independently are substantial, especially in the younger age groups. In 2013, on the EU level, the gap between young people living with their parents or not was 39.0 percentage points in the 16 to 19 age group, 17.4 percentage points among 20 to 24 year olds, while it was only 2.5 percentage points in the favour independent young people in the oldest, 25 to 29 age group. In 2013, risk of poverty for young people aged 20 to 29 not living with their parents in Austria was 29%, and which is above EU28 average (23%) (EU YOUTH REPORT 2015 – SOCIAL). Many of those are care leavers, young people for whom leaving care is a final event - there is no option to return in the times of difficulty. Also, they often have to cope with major status changes in their lives at the time of leaving care: leaving foster care or their children's home and setting up a new home, often in a new area, and for some young people starting a family as well; leaving school and finding their way into further education, training or employment, or coping with unemployment. They are denied the psychological opportunity and space to focus on, or to deal with issues over time, which is how most young people cope with the challenges of transition (Coleman & Hendry 1999).

Steins (2007) research review shows that these different pathways are associated with the quality of care they experience, their transitions from care and the support they

receive after care. Furthermore, Stein emphasises: Improving outcomes for these young people will require more comprehensive responses across their life course:

- 1) early intervention and family support;
- 2) providing better quality care to compensate their damaging pre-care experiences through stability and continuity, as well as assistance to overcome educational deficits;
- 3) providing opportunities for more gradual transitions from care that are more akin to normative transitions;
- 4) providing ongoing support to those young people who need it, especially those young people with mental-health problems and complex needs

Concerning the first two points, Austria has a well-developed and very broad system of youth welfare. Among preventive measures few are mentioned here: Interdisciplinary Early Intervention and Family Support, individual support for children and adolescents between 10 to 18 years in problem situations, crises service, psychological treatment, therapeutic help, social and learning mentoring, etc. Furthermore, there are numerous services in the alternative care system (Socio-educational residential communities for children and adolescents, Residential community for mother and child, Crisis accommodation, Supervised Residential Group, Residential care for young couples with children, Family-similar residential communities, foster care, Psychotherapeutic Support, Intensive care with special schooling in residential communities ...).

However, there are no national measures in the aftercare. In Austria, aftercare is predominantly voluntary service provided by residential care homes and foster parents. This means that most of the registered residential care homes have

developed their own support and preparation system for their clients to reach independence after leaving their (alternative) home.

### 3.3.1. NGOs AFTERCARE CONCEPTS

Concepts that are developed by NGOs who provide residential care are quite similar so instead of bringing an example of one NGO, the basics of their aftercare work are presented in further text.

#### **1. Support during the stay within the alternative care facilities:**

Care in the facilities is usually provided by social - pedagogues on 24 h/ 7days a week basis. The focus at this step is on supporting school or vocational training and as well social (and life) skills, including the development of self-confidence as a pathway to independence.

#### **2. Semi-independent housing program:**

Usually at the age of 16, a young person has a possibility to move to a special separate living space in the same building or in its vicinity. This step usually lasts for another year or two. During this period, the young person should gain more life skills and psycho-social competencies. By teaching self-development skills and the simultaneous reduction of care units, self-organizing skills and independence grow.

#### **3. Semi-independent housing program outside of the care facility:**

The last step for the young person is to move from the youth facility. The care of the social – pedagogues is reduced to a minimum. The goal is to integrate the young person into his new living environment.

#### EXAMPLE OF A GOOD PRACTICE WITHIN AFTERCARE:

PROJECT: MAKE ME SMILE (THERAPY COMMUNITIES AUSTRIA)

NGO Therapy Communities Austria ([www.t-communities.org](http://www.t-communities.org)) founded a fund where care leavers can apply for help. Furthermore, the help provided is not only based on financial support, but this fund also finances one trained person which is available for the young care leaver to give counselling and support. This funds exist for two years and the first results are showing that it is highly appreciated by young care leavers

#### TRAININGS AND CAMPS (FICE AUSTRIA)

FICE Austria as a national operating NGO provides special trainings and “camps” for care leavers. Aim of this trainings is to prepare the young people for a secure and faster integration to the adult’s world. In this training, a psycho-social support is also provided to reflect the disadvantages due the fact of being care-leaver.

#### 4. IMPLICATIONS

Youth unemployment is one of the most important topics in European countries in the last years. The cause of this lies in economic crises which hit this population the most. Youth unemployment has risen dramatically, covering even 60% of youth in some EU countries (Spain, Greece, Croatia). Although Austria has been hit by the crisis as well, youth unemployment remained relatively low (10, 8% in 2015, EUROSTAT). Strong economy and wide range of social measures are one of the pillars of Austrian success but also one important part being its dual apprenticeship system. Over 70% of young people opt for a VET programme after completing lower secondary level and 40% of them choose the Dual system. According to Ryan (2000) advantages of Dual apprenticeship system are contribution to positive economic development by providing

demanded qualifications and reduction of early school leavers because of attractive combination of theoretical and practical learning (plus possibility of earning the money for the practical part of the work). Reason for Dual system's success lies also in the fact that Austrian Government faces economy challenges with different types of measures. For instance, the training guarantee has proven to be a successful strategy for the inclusion of young people at risk in the labour market. Thanks to this and other measures (e.g. Youth coaching, Production schools, etc.) Austria has also one of the lowest rates of NEETs (9.6%) and early school leavers (7%). Although Austria has good achievements in many sectors there are some challenges needed to be faced. European Commission draws attention to a high risk of social exclusion for young people with migrant background, impact of socio-economic status on educational performance and lack of consistent strategic orientation of higher education with a high rate of drop-outs. To the aforementioned we would add creating "safety-net" measures for care leavers in a process of reaching independence.

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