

Austrian Youth Strategy

Summary



The Youth Strategy of the Federal Ministry of Economy, Family and Youth is a process designed to strengthen and develop youth policy throughout Austria.

The goal of this strategy is to bring together policies and measures for young people, to make them systematic and to optimise their effectiveness.

It also aims to discover new fields of action and cooperation, to make new calls for action and to support these with concrete measures that can be readily implemented.

01

**Employment
and
Learning**

02

**Participation
and
Initiative**

03

**Quality of Life
and
a Spirit of Cooperation**

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Youth Strategy: Process and Network

The main concerns of Austrian youth policy are ensuring the well-being of young people and providing them with opportunities for the future. The Austrian Youth Strategy of the Federal Ministry of Economy, Family and Youth (BMWfJ)¹ is therefore developing a scheme for all of Austria that pools knowledge in the field of youth policy.

The main focus of this strategy is on the 14- to 24-year-old age group, though the youth strategy extends further to encompass young people under 30 years of age. Policies and measures for these groups should be collected, systematised and optimised for maximum effectiveness. At the same time, the Youth Strategy should identify new fields of action and co-operation. In all areas, the Youth Strategy formulate visions, goals and measures that are to be implemented.

A core criterion of the Youth Strategy is the active inclusion of young people. This is facilitated indirectly through the continual involvement of the Austrian National Youth Council as well as additional national networks for youth work and youth information. But the Youth Strategy is also based on research and surveys. Using specific methods such as focus groups, the needs and concerns of young people can flow directly into the Youth Strategy development process.

Development steps

In February 2012 the Federal Minister of Economy, Family and Youth established a development group (see p. 4) for the Youth Strategy. The group formulated the framework for substantive goals based on the EU Youth Strategy (and its eight fields of action) and developed the first measures for youth participation. From an ambitious pool of ideas, they selected central goals to begin being implemented in the same year.

¹ Subsequently referred to as the Ministry of Youth

Autumn 2012 saw the launch of the youth participation process that allowed young people to incorporate their concerns and ideas in to the further development of the strategy. At the same time, the Ministry of Youth started its Youth Screening (see p. 5) model project.

In 2013 the participation process was continued, with additional stakeholders being incorporated into working groups. While long-term goals were being developed, additional priority measures were defined and their implementation initiated.

Based on the results of the youth participation process, eight fields of action were given strategic framework objectives (see p. 7) and the Youth Competence Centre was created.

Youth Competence Centre

The operating unit for the Youth Strategy is the Youth Competence Centre in the Ministry of Youth. Established in May 2013, the Centre coordinates key activities, offers knowledge and skills, and establishes contact with experts. The goal of the Centre is to develop a stable network between a diverse group of youth policy stakeholders. The political responsibility for the implementation is however still the province of the individual government departments and institutions.

Development Group

A development group was established to guide the Youth Strategy in its efforts to integrate the Youth Council and extracurricular youth work and maintain the expertise and support of these organisations.

The Youth Strategy development group meets monthly and is comprised of

- the National Youth Council,
- the Centre of Competence for Open Youth work in Austria,
- the Austrian Youth Information Centres,
- the National Correspondent to the European research networks and
- Employees of the Youth Policy Department and the Youth Competence Centre in the Ministry of Youth.

The development group discusses policy focuses for the Youth Strategy and develops recommendations for relevant measures. Based on this core group and the impulses it creates, working groups and round tables with additional stakeholders on specific topics are organised.

Youth Screening

A further instrument of the Youth Strategy is the Youth Screening initiative. It draws attention to the concerns of young people in all areas of politics and the bureaucracy. Within the different administrative departments, the “Knowledge – Transparency – Latitude” process provides for stable structures. A summary of the KTL model is as follows:

- Providing *knowledge* about the situation, needs and diversity of the target group (young people) as well as about important youth policy stakeholders at the various levels.
- Providing *transparency* about important youth policy measures, activities and services of the individual administrative departments as the necessary foundation for youth policy coordination efforts.
- Engendering innovative and creative cooperation between elected officials, government agencies, young people and other stakeholders give everyone involved a new kind of *latitude*.

The Youth Competence Centre supports administrative departments as they make use of this process.

National Action Plans and Strategies

An initial analysis of existing National Action Plans and Strategies in Austria makes clear that the concerns of young people are understood theoretically to be an important horizontal issue, one that is however not adequately accounted for in practice. Furthermore, the architects of these plans and strategies are so numerous and varied that coordination is difficult.

The mission of the Youth Competence Centre is to discover not only synergies but also redundancies at an early stage and to facilitate exchanges of experience between the individuals responsible for the action plans. With

this goal in mind, an initial round table with the different coordinators was organised in May 2013.

Incorporating the Provinces

Active cooperation with the provincial governments will be a decisive factor in the success of the Youth Strategy in a federally structured country like Austria. With 10 April 2013 resolution, ranking officials in the individual provincial governments initiated the Youth Offensive 2020. In the wording of the resolution, they declared that “the goals of the Youth Strategy set forth by the Federal Ministry of Economy, Family and Youth are in their entirety [commensurate with] their own goals.” The Youth Offensive 2020 in the provincial governments stipulates that numerous structural elements of the Youth Strategy be incorporated in the work of the individual provinces.

Strategic Framework Objectives

The substantive tasks and organisation of the Youth Strategy are based on eight fields of action that are oriented toward the EU Youth Strategy 2010-2018². The eight fields of action of the Youth Strategy mirror the different ways of life of young people and provide the necessary space for youth policy measures to be implemented.

The Fields of Action:

- Education and training
- Employment and entrepreneurship
- Voluntary work
- Health and well-being
- Youth in the world
- Creativity and culture
- Social inclusion
- Participation

As the Youth Strategy was developed, these fields of action were assigned to existing youth policy goals and measures. This was then also carried out with the relevant youth policy goals of other National Action Plans and Strategies (see p. 5). Measures that were adapted or newly devised for the Youth Strategy were also assigned to one – or more – fields of action. The important questions associated with youth participation were and are directed towards the fields of action.

A next step involved the definition of the higher-level category group of strategic framework objectives that consider the fields of action in their thematic proximity to one another. Youth policy measures, though placed in one field of action, presuppose complex effects that simultaneously affect multiple fields of action.

The “education and training” field of action, for example, often involves “employment and entrepreneurship”, making it therefore logical for these

² Council Resolution of 27 November 2009 on a renewed framework for cooperation in the youth field in Europe (2010-18) [Official Journal C 311 of 19.12.2009].

fields to be combined within the strategic framework objective of Employment and Education so that they can be communicated together.

The Strategic Framework Objectives

1. Employment and Learning
2. Participation and Initiative
3. Quality of Life and a Spirit of Cooperation

Three measurable strategic goals along with recommendations for concrete measures were formulated for each of the three framework objectives. These goals are sketched out in brief below. In doing so, the attempt was made to articulate recommendations for measures that can be implemented for each goal over the short, middle and long term.

The Ministry of Youth considers itself to be the impetus behind this initiative. The implementation of these measures is the task and responsibility of those involved in shaping social policy and it must be supported by a broad youth policy consensus.

At the same time, the Ministry of Youth is aware of numerous existing measures – in the area of employment, among others. The Youth Strategy should therefore offer an additional impetus to shift the focus more strongly toward the perspectives of young people or to incorporate still inactive yet relevant stakeholders.

1 Employment and Learning

Education secures young people's futures

The widespread prosperity in Austrian society is predicated to a large extent on the skills and qualifications of Austrian workers. Austrian youth policy is therefore geared towards helping young people develop their talents as best they can. High-level qualifications make it possible for young people to meet current and future challenges in the working world and to take advantage of the opportunities presented to them in the best way possible.

The labour market situation for young people in Austria is extremely favourable in comparison to the rest of Europe. At 7.6%, youth unemployment is comparatively low. In March 2013, only the rate in Germany was just as low. Denmark came in third place in the European ranking, though with a much higher rate of youth unemployment at 14.5%.

Demographic trends lead to lower numbers of entrants into the vocational education system and therefore also to decreasing numbers of diploma holders. For this reason, the number of people in the employment system is also continually on the decline. Qualified young people are therefore extremely valuable on the labour market.

It is in this context that the Youth Strategy evaluates the employment perspectives and the actual employment situations of young people in Austria, with the goal being full employment among 15 to 24 year-olds. The focus of the recommendations lies on improving vocational and practically oriented learning. This means more opportunities for young people and ensures that Austria will have the qualified workers it needs to face the future.

Strategic Goal 1.1: In 2020 Austria will continue to be among the top three countries in the EU in youth employment (15 to 24 year-olds)

The most important reason for the comparatively good integration of young people in the labour market – apart from overall low unemployment numbers – is Austria's highly developed system of initial vocational training (apprenticeships, middle- and higher-level secondary technical and vocational

colleges). The dual system of apprenticeships in companies and in vocational schools for apprentices ensures that Austria will maintain its excellent position in international rankings. Thanks to the participation of companies, the dual apprenticeship system is the upper secondary level educational form that requires by far the least public funding.

One of the challenges for the Austrian vocational education system is the integration of young people with immigrant backgrounds into the vocational training and employment system.

According to the subjective view of young people, both school and vocational education lack practical relevance, a situation which puts young people at risk of choosing the wrong career. This is one of the results of the focus group analysis undertaken as part of the Youth Strategy. In a May 2013 survey conducted by the Youth Monitor (see p. 18), 75% of the young people who participated expressed a desire to take part in a compulsory internship while still in school. 86% would like to be provided with more information in school about internship opportunities.

In order to be able to ensure that the youth unemployment rate in Austria remains low, measures to complement existing action plans and strategies in the areas of economic, social and education policy were recommended as part of the Youth Strategy.

Recommendations (examples):

- *WIK:I – “What I Know (and what I didn’t learn in school)” as part of a low-threshold programme to create a skills portfolio for young people (model to begin in late 2013)*
- *Check list of quality internships for companies and young people*

Strategic Goal 1.2: In 2020 Austria will have the lowest rate of early school leavers in the EU

Young people with low levels of educational attainment who have not completed any education beyond compulsory schooling are often at risk of encountering only limited job and income opportunities, a greater chance of becoming unemployed and social exclusion. These risks are greater still for early school leavers.

Even though at 7.6% the percentage of 18 to 24 year-olds in Austria without a secondary school leaving certificate, completed apprenticeship or other form of training was low in 2012 compared to other European countries, it still constitutes a call for serious action.

There is a complex set of interdependent causes and effects for the phenomenon of early school leaving. One's socioeconomic environment, a lack of individual problem-solving strategies and systemic conditions all play a role. Because of these factors, the measures to help young people reach their goals must be multifaceted and interconnected.

Recommendations (examples):

- *Incorporate extracurricular youth work in school early warning systems when young people are at risk of leaving school early*
- *Make school careers more flexible*

Strategic Goal 1.3: Austria will produce more company founders under 30 years of age

The importance of entrepreneurs in modern economies and societies is growing. More and more people are starting a business. A breakdown according to age however shows that there is still great potential for founders under 30. In an Austria-wide survey, the largest percentage of company founders (42.2%) was between 30 and 39 years of age.

Recommendations (examples):

- *Offer more and better opportunities for entrepreneurial learning*
- *Integrate entrepreneurship into the curriculum; increase use of "practice firms" in all types of schools*

2 Participation and Initiative

It pays to take the initiative

A thriving democracy needs ambitious people who want to take the initiative and participate, but it also needs to have the conditions that support this initiative. This is especially the case for young people. They should be able to speak out, offer suggestions and participate in decisions that affect their lives.

With its voting age set at 16 years, Austria is a pioneer in Europe with regard to participatory democracy among young people. Studies have shown that early inclusion in institutionalised participation systems such as elections generally results in a stronger desire to participate in political decision-making processes.

Besides elections, there are numerous forms of participation in Austria, of which only a portion are actually used by young people. It must therefore be clarified whether existing forms of participation truly meet the needs of today's youth and how barriers to participation can be lowered, especially for groups from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The potential for youth to take the initiative is great: In Austria there is a long and – compared to other European countries – pronounced tradition of volunteering. One-third of young people in Austria participate in some form of voluntary work, an above average number. The recognition of skills acquired from volunteering – via non-formal or informal pathways – by the formal education system or by employers is still in its infancy.

With this in mind, the area of Participation and Initiative focuses on improving the political and social participation of young people and devising a more contemporary recognition and incentive system for taking the initiative to do voluntary work.

Strategic Goal 2.1: First-time voters will have the highest turnout

Whether low voter turnout is harmful to democracy and if so, at what level is a contentious question in political science. For political scientists, however, there is no question that elections are more strongly skewed from a

social perspective the lower voter turnout becomes. If young people vote, this implies that they are interested in political events and in shaping the course of the society in which they live.

Recommendations (examples):

- *Publish non-partisan "voting guides" for first-time voters (are offered for the first time in the run-up to the parliamentary elections in September 2013)*
- *Introduce "Citizenship Education" as a statutory subject in all schools beginning in the seventh year of school*

Strategic Goal 2.2: 50% of all young people between the ages of 14 and 24 will have taken part in a participation project

According to surveys, Austria's young people are of the opinion that they can effect a certain amount of change through existing means of participation. Their interest in being able to have a say in matters concerning education, work and free time as well as their desire for additional opportunities to participate in different areas of life is also strong.

This high level of interest in participation is accompanied by numerous opportunities to participate. In addition to institutionalised offerings like Youth Parliament and planning workshops (for designing new concepts for public spaces, for example), new forms of participation are becoming more popular, especially those involving the internet.

Recommendations (examples):

- *Give young people a bigger voice; help publicise existing participation projects (for current model project see p. 18)*
- *Further education concept "modern participation" for multipliers*

Strategic goal 2.3: 50% of young people will take the initiative on their own to do voluntary work

Voluntary work plays a large role in Austria at the communal level. There are numerous organisations and projects involved in different areas such as emergency relief, culture, the environment, religion, social work, politics,

local communities, education and sport. Volunteering makes it possible to experience being in a position of responsibility for society. It offers people the chance to acquire valuable skills that could be relevant in the workplace.

Voluntary work is widespread among young people in Austria. At 45% the rate of youth participation is nearly equal to that of adults, which means that more than 500,000 young people are engaged in voluntary work! Specifically, 30% of young people are formal volunteers (in organisations, societies) and 26% of young people are informal volunteers (in neighbourhood associations, for instance). A number of these young people (11.4%) are active in formal and informal volunteering.

Recommendations (examples):

- *Offer (non-material) awards and recognition for young people engaged in voluntary work*
- *Provide support for youth organisations that manage their volunteers professionally*

3 Quality of Life and a Spirit of Cooperation

Let's work together on the future

Changes in many different areas of life require active planning. Young people must be adequately supported and challenged so that they are ready to assume responsibility for their futures. Austrian youth policy therefore provides young people with the tools they need to live independent and self-reliant lives without being overly intrusive.

Being satisfied with their lives is an important concern for young people.

The third international UNICEF comparative overview of child well-being in industrialised countries shows that the life satisfaction of young people in Austria is relatively low. A league table of countries in the study shows Austria in 16th place out of 29 countries with regard to how Austrian girls and boys rate their satisfaction with their own lives. Among rich industrialised countries, Austria comes in at number 18 overall in creating well-being for its youngest citizens (UNICEF 2013).

Youth policy requires a comprehensive evaluation of the objective situation AND the subjective appraisal of young people. This helps clarify which areas require the most immediate attention so that young people can successfully navigate the passage to adult life with the necessary optimism. The area of Quality of Life and a Spirit of Cooperation therefore addresses the facets of young people's lives that concern this period of growth and transition to adulthood, like health, the environment, family, mobility but also personal life perspectives and life satisfaction.

Strategic Goal 3.1: Young people will be more optimistic about their futures

Young people are ambivalent when it comes to their perspectives for the future: Three-fourths of 14 to 24 year-olds have a positive view of their own future. A majority of them, however, expect a worsening in the coming years in number of aspects of life such as pensions, government services, income levels and jobs.

The goal is therefore to ensure that young people have good individual opportunities for the future and to improve their view of the opportunities that society will offer in the future.

Recommendations (examples):

- *Create a Better Life Index tailored to young people that includes a monitoring board responsible for deriving measures from the Index*
- *Harmonise and strengthen concepts for “youth-friendly communities”*

Strategic Goal 3.2: Austria will rank among the three best countries in the EU in the health of its young people

Compared with other countries around the world, Austria offers excellent healthcare. There is however a need for improvement with regard to the promotion of healthy living and preventive care among young people.

In an Austria-wide survey in 2007, for example, approximately 11% of 6- to 15-year-old children in Austria were overweight and another 8% were obese, 50% more than in the 1990s. Other lifestyle factors have also proven to have worrying consequences. Avoiding factors that pose health risks and supporting protective health measure must therefore be high on the agenda. Nationwide coordination and preventive measures taken at an early age have the best effect.

Recommendations (examples):

- *Concentrate funding from the Ministry of Youth for youth organisations on “physical activity and health” (beginning in 2014)*
- *Provide a comprehensive package of measures titled “Lifestyle PLUS”, with incentives to support physical activity and to help young people deal with their own sexuality and body image*

Strategic Goal 3.3: 50% of young people will see sustainability as an important personal and societal goal

Sustainability affects the future and livelihood of children and youth like no other topic. It comprises not only environmental but also social concerns. Relevant fields of action are climate protection, conservation of natural re-

sources, mobility and consumer behaviour. It is crucial to their future that young people pursue sustainable development as both an individual and a societal goal.

Recommendations (examples):

- *Create easy to apply for micro-financing instruments for projects by young people using the Youth Banks model*
- *Introduce a "Sustainability Driving Licence" to provide information and teach skills in the style of the European Computer Driving Licence*

Youth Participation

During the development of the Austrian Youth Strategy, youth participation has played and will continue to play a central role. Youth participation is also one of the three big strategic framework objectives of the Youth strategy. The following overview will show which models and methods can be applied to continue to develop the Youth Strategy.

Youth Strategy on Tour

As part of the Youth Strategy on Tour, young people are surveyed using qualitative methods from the social sciences. At the same time, they are provided with the opportunity to give voice to their own ideas, desires, concerns and recommendations and to discuss them and put them down in words in workshops with their peers.

Online Surveys on the Youth Portal

On the Austrian Youth Portal (www.oesterreichisches-jugendportal.at – in German) regular online surveys are conducted on a wide variety of youth policy topics. Around 300 to 500 young people take part in each of these surveys. The results are incorporated into the Youth Strategy and are published on the Youth Portal. Furthermore, these online surveys are part of the Structured Dialogue within the framework of the EU Youth Strategy.

Youth Monitor

Since 2010 the Ministry of Youth has been collecting the opinions and attitudes of Austrian young people via the Youth Monitor. For each evaluation, 800 representative young people across Austria from the 14–24 age group are selected for telephone surveys. Some individual questions are asked again in subsequent surveys for comparison, but the surveys also have their own main focus such as work, education or the family.

Youth Check

On 1 January 2013 the Youth Check (effect-oriented impact assessment) went into effect. The law stipulates that all new legislative and regulatory proposals be evaluated for the potential consequences they could have for children, young people and young adults. This instrument make it easier for

youth organisations, in particular the National Youth Council, to become involved in the legislative process.

Giving Young People a bigger Voice

The model initiative “Giving Young People a bigger Voice” will be rolled out in 2013 with the intention of establishing it as a continuous process in 2014. It will collect the results of participation projects, process them according to target group and publish them.

e-Participation

The e-Participation BarCamp (2012) constitutes the beginning of a more intense examination of the issue of youth participation via the internet. In cooperation with the international Youthpart project (www.youthpart.de – in German), relevant standards are being developed. An international Youth BarCamp (October 2013 in Vienna, Austria) will incorporate young people into this process.

Austrian Youth Portal

Information is the basis of every form of participation.

The Austrian Youth Portal (www.oesterreichisches-jugendportal.at - in German, www.oesterreichisches-jugendportal.at/english/ - info in English) is operated by the National Network of Austrian Youth Information Centres on behalf of the Ministry of Youth. It offers a selectively chosen and regularly updated collection of annotated links to a wide array of youth-related topics, thereby making it easier for young people to remain informed. From the beginning onward, young people have been involved in the development of the Youth Portal. In 2013 a special youth team was put together to assist the editors of the site in presenting the online information in a youth-appropriate manner.

Further Information

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